APRIL 1961

Commentary

JEWISHNESS AND THE YOUNGER INTELLECTUALS

A SYMPOSIUM

Raziel Abelson
Alfred G. Aronowitz
Aaron Asher
Werner Cohn
Malcolm L. Diamond
Jason Epstein
Irving Feldman
Herbert Gold
Enoch Gordis
Philip Green
Andrew Hacker
Nat Hentoff
John Hollander
Judith Jarvis
Elihu Katz
Joseph Kraft
Robert Langbaum
Robert J. Lifton
Michael Maccoby
Wallace Markfield
Hugh Nissenson
Ned Polsky
Marcus G. Raskin
Lionel Rogosin
Edgar Rosenberg
Philip Roth
Sonya Rudikoff
Samuel Shapiro
Barbara Probst Solomon
Richard G. Stern
Allan Temko

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

An Evaluation of the First Phase

Oscar Gass

THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN AMERICA . . . 1961

Nathan Glazer

CHALLENGE TO NEGRO LEADERSHIP

The Case of Robert Williams

Julian Mayfield

OBSERVATIONS

Harris Dienstfrey: **The Novels of Vance Bourjaily**

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

60c

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Random House Books

Nancy Wilson Ross

THE WORLD OF ZEN. "A handsome book that should delight many enthusiasts . . . A splendid introduction to an absorbing subject." — DONALD KEENE, *N. Y. Times Book Review.* 400 pages. Over 50 superb illustrations. $10.00

Isak Dinesen

SHADOWS ON THE GRASS. "A quartet of serene elegies to her Africa of far away and long ago." — CHARLES POORE, *New York Times.* Illustrated with portraits painted by the author. $3.75

Robert Penn Warren

THE LEGACY OF THE CIVIL WAR. A penetrating essay on how the Civil War has shaped modern America. $2.75

Ayn Rand

FOR THE NEW INTELLECTUAL: The Philosophy of Ayn Rand. The main philosophical passages from Miss Rand's 4 novels, and a brief presentation of the essentials of her new philosophical system. $3.95

Oliver Statler

JAPANESE INN. These beguiling tales of intrigue, love and violence reflect 400 years of Japanese history and folklore. Illustrated with prints, woodcuts and drawings. $6.50

Now at your bookstore · RANDOM HOUSE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Statement of Aims

In sponsoring COMMENTARY, *the American Jewish Committee aims to meet the need for a journal of significant thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues. Its pages will be hospitable to diverse points of view and belief, and it hopes to encourage original creative endeavor in the various fields of culture.*

The opinions and views expressed by COMMENTARY'S *contributors and editors are their own; and do not necessarily express the Committee's viewpoint or position. The sponsorship of* COMMENTARY *by the Committee is in line with its general program to enlighten and clarify public opinion on problems of Jewish concern, to fight bigotry and protect human rights, and to promote Jewish cultural interest and creative achievement in America.*

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
HERBERT B. EHRMANN, *President*

THE COMMENTARY PUBLICATION COMMITTEE

RALPH E. SAMUEL, *Chairman*

CHARLES D. BREITEL RICHARD C. ERNST ALBERT FURTH
MAURICE GLINERT J. M. KAPLAN SYDNEY M. KAYE EDWARD KUHN, JR.
LEWIS J. LAVENTHOL HAROLD MANHEIM PEARSON E. NEAMAN
DAVID SHER HARRY STEINER ALAN M. STROOCK BEN TOUSTER

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ZIM to israel

SWIFT
LUXURIOUS
LIVELY

SAILING
From New York every third week:
S.S. Israel and S.S. Zion, stopping en route at Madeira and Greece
From Mediterranean ports weekly:
S.S. Theodor Herzl and
S.S. Jerusalem (in season)

- Stabilizer-equipped for smooth sailing
- Tempting, strictly kosher cuisine
- Lively Israeli atmosphere

Consult your travel agent
—he's your best source of advice

ZIM Lines צ"ים

Owner's Rep: AMERICAN ISRAELI SHIPPING CO., INC. 42 Broadway, New York 4, N.Y.

ISRAEL
DISCOUNT BANK, LTD.

HEAD OFFICE: 27 YEHUDA HALEVY ST., TEL AVIV

76 BRANCHES THROUGHOUT ISRAEL

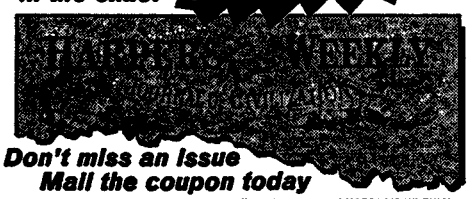
COMPLETE BANKING SERVICES

TOTAL ASSETS EXCEED
IL. 325,000,000

REPRESENTATIVE'S OFFICE
61 BROADWAY, NEW YORK 6, N. Y.
PHONE: WH 3-3860

Follow the
CIVIL WAR
as a citizen of the 1860's in the exact

REISSUES OF HARPER'S WEEKLY!



Don't miss an issue
Mail the coupon today

Each week you can receive an exact replica of the issue of HARPER'S WEEKLY which appeared just 100 years ago. Nothing is omitted; contains all the exciting "news" and fascinating woodcuts of the war years. Reproduced by lithography, each reissue is the original tabloid size (16 pages) and on similar paper. Reprinted with permission of Harper & Brothers, New York, N.Y. BONUS: With each issue, a commentary supplement by Dr. James Robertson, prize-winning editor of Civil War History.

Living History, Inc.
4 York Avenue, Shenandoah, Iowa
Send The Reissues of Harper's Weekly, with your money-back guarantee on the unused portion of my subscription.

☐ $12 per year (52 issues), paper wrapped.
☐ $14 per year (52 issues), sent in envelope.
☐ Start with current issue
☐ Start with first issue (Dec. 29, 1860)

Name_____
Address_____

☐ Check enclosed ☐ Please bill me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Commentary

APRIL 1961
NUMBER 4
VOLUME 31

Political Economy & the New Administration 277 OSCAR GASS

The Peace Movement in America . . . 1961 288 NATHAN GLAZER

Challenge to Negro Leadership 297 JULIAN MAYFIELD

Jewishness & the Younger Intellectuals—A Symposium*

Introduction 306 NORMAN PODHORETZ

Contributors 311

Raziel Abelson Alfred G. Aronowitz Aaron Asher
Werner Cohn Malcolm L. Diamond Jason Epstein
Irving Feldman Herbert Gold Enoch Gordis
Philip Green Andrew Hacker Nat Hentoff
John Hollander Judith Jarvis Elihu Katz
Joseph Kraft Robert Langbaum Robert J. Lifton
Michael Maccoby Wallace Markfield Hugh Nissenson
Ned Polsky Marcus G. Raskin Lionel Rogosin
Edgar Rosenberg Philip Roth Sonya Rudikoff
Samuel Shapiro Barbara Probst Solomon
Richard G. Stern Allan Temko

Observations The Novels of Vance Bourjaily 360 HARRIS DIENSTFREY

Letters from Readers 364

*Because many more people than we had anticipated responded to our invitation to join in the symposium, we have been forced to omit this month's "Books in Review," but regular publication of that feature will be resumed in May. The second part of Herbert Weiner's article "The Dead Hasidim" and the department "In the Community," which were also scheduled for publication in this number, will appear next month instead.

Editor: NORMAN PODHORETZ

Managing Editor
SHERRY ABEL

Associate Editors
HARRIS DIENSTFREY
THEODORE SOLOTAROFF

Contributing Editors
MILTON HIMMELFARB
GEORGE LICHTHEIM

Editorial Assistant
BRENDA BROWN

General Manager: FRANCES GREEN

Advertising
DOROTHY PUTNEY

COMMENTARY is published monthly by the American Jewish Committee • Single copy 60¢; $7 a year; 2 years $12; 3 years $17 • No extra Canadian or foreign postage charge • Editorial & Business offices: 165 East 56th Street, New York 22 • Printed at 10 McGovern Avenue, Lancaster, Pa. by Business Press, Inc. • Second class postage paid at Lancaster •

Copyright 1961 by the American Jewish Committee; all rights reserved under International and Pan American Copyright Conventions •

Indexed in Readers' Guide & Public Affairs Information Service • **Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW

VINTAGE BOOKS

Combining MODERN LIBRARY PAPERBACKS and VINTAGE BOOKS

One of the first important results of the recent merger of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. and Random House is the combining of two of the most distinguished paperback series in the country — Vintage Books and Modern Library paperbacks — under the single imprint of Vintage Books. The Vintage series now includes such important authors as Camus, Cather, Faulkner, Forster, Gide, Graves, Malraux, Mann, Mencken, O'Neill, Sartre and Wallace Stevens.

The following titles for Spring 1961 represent the first combined list to be published under the new Vintage imprint.

BUDDENBROOKS
A novel by THOMAS MANN
$1.85 V-180

THE SHORES OF LIGHT
By EDMUND WILSON
$1.95 V-181

I, CLAUDIUS
A novel by ROBERT GRAVES
$1.45 V-182

THE CRUCIAL DECADE — AND AFTER
America 1945-1960 by ERIC F. GOLDMAN $1.45 V-183

THE TOWN
By WILLIAM FAULKNER
$1.25 V-184

COMMUNIST CHINA AND ASIA By A. DOAK BARNETT
$1.65 V-185

TOLSTOY OR DOSTOEVSKY
By GEORGE STEINER
$1.25 V-186

A ROOM WITH A VIEW
A novel by E. M. Forster
$1.25 V-187

PARZIVAL
By WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH, a new translation by Helen M. Mustard and Charles E. Passage
$1.65 V-188

ROBERT E. LEE
By EARL SCHENCK MIERS
95¢ V-189

LINCOLN RECONSIDERED
Essays on the Civil War Era by DAVID DONALD; second, revised edition $1.25 V-190

THE MAUVE DECADE
American Life at the End of the 19th Century by THOMAS BEER $1.10 V-191

THE QUESTION OF NATIONAL DEFENSE
By OSKAR MORGENSTERN; 2nd, revised edition $1.25 V-192

Now at your bookstore ***RANDOM HOUSE***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OSCAR GASS

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

I The Politics

IN THE FIRST PHASE of his White House career, President Kennedy has thrilled his American audiences with the call to sacrifice and comforted them by not asking for any. Here is the voice of Kennedy as candidate:

> I believe in an America that is on the march. . . . If we continue to stand still—if we continue to lie at anchor—if we continue to sit on dead center—if we content ourselves with the easy life and rosy assurances—then the gates will soon be open to a lean and hungry enemy. . . .

The President continues where the candidate left off. Ten days after taking office he looked again around the world and he was then

> . . . staggered upon learning . . . the harsh enormity of the trials through which we must pass in the next four years. . . . Each day we draw nearer the hour of maximum danger . . . [because] the tide of events has been running out and time has not been our friend.

So beleaguered, the President raises the flag of National Unity. He seeks for accommodation and support on the right, while he endeavors to retain the allegiances of the traditional American minorities and of organized labor. He quiets the unreasoning fears of the business community—perhaps the greatest success of his first month in office. The stock market rose sharply from November through January. On February 19, a New York *Times* headline read, "Wall St. at Ease on New Frontier." Why not? No significant American political force challenges the role of private business. Why should American businessmen go in fear because a Democrat sits in the White House?

In addressing the research organization of the National Association of Manufacturers, the President could say, in all sincerity, "I feel that I can claim kinship here. . . ." He pledged ". . . we will not discriminate for or against any segment of our society . . ." and that pledge was taken as meaningful. He promised he would initiate a move to reduce income taxes for corporations engaging in a high level of investment, and that promise was credited.

The Kennedy election campaign had won back to the Democratic party the support of many Catholics and had held the party's position among Negroes and Jews. Kennedy had the endorsement of the leaders of organized labor and of the more vocal New England intellectuals. He won

---

OSCAR GASS contributed a four-part series on problems of democracy and socialism to our issues of January, February, June, and July 1960. A consulting economist in private practice in Washington, D. C., Mr. Gass has been adviser to various governments abroad, including that of Israel.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Northeast and the Southeast. Yet he did not carry the farm areas, the Rocky Mountains, or the Pacific Coast. He ran painfully behind his party. He lost both Ohio and California, despite their past easy election of popular Democratic governors. The distinctively left-liberal elements in the Congress also lost some ground in the election, whereas the Republicans gained 22 seats.

Voting analysts agree that Kennedy probably would have been defeated by Eisenhower. Against Nixon, he conducted a cautious campaign, attempting to evoke an image of the fresh and alert, seeking for meaningful distinctions of nuance. He was a Democrat, and had not the Democratic party historically been the party more concerned for the welfare of *all* the American people? Would it not attend more compassionately to the education of the young and the needs of the aged? Would it not proudly hold up the head of America before the world and make the United States, in all matters of value, "first"? Kennedy did not really emphasize the existence of an economic recession. He avoided issues of social controversy. And he won the presidency by a bare plurality of a hundred thousand votes. His subsequent actions were shaped by that meager outcome—though not by it alone.

SEARCHING FOR A wide consensus among existing, effective political forces, the President-elect chose a Cabinet containing only two or three individuals whose outlook would have precluded their holding the same posts under Eisenhower. At the sub-Cabinet level, he chose considerable new talent and of an interesting pattern. These sub-Cabinet officers think of themselves as pragmatic, businesslike. One of them said recently, "This administration has no ideology, but it has style. It is athletic, spare, austere." (Perhaps by their self-portraits shall ye know them!)

The same pattern was reflected in the President's conduct of his relations with the Congress. On the Senatorial filibuster, he looked in the other direction while his official leadership voted with their avowed enemies—accepting what appears to have been a quite unnecessary defeat. Some thought this might prove to be the greatest political blunder of 1961. Wise or foolish, it was no chance occurrence, but part of the chosen style of play, an incident in the fundamental political strategy.

Those who prefer an intellectual expression of this style and strategy may find some of its roots exposed in a pre-election publication of one who is now a White House assistant. The passage appears in a chapter interestingly entitled "The Political Economy of a Continental Community in a Time of Protracted Crisis":

> The issue for the American agenda is, then, how to shift the focus of national politics from . . . problems of income distribution, security and power as among social classes . . . to the isues of communal survival and communal development which are, in fact, now and foreseeably central to the nation's life and its welfare.*

For "communal survival," read Arms and Foreign Aid. For "communal development"—read Galbraith.

Mr. Arthur Goldberg, the new Secretary of Labor, expressed the same thought and strategy in a more homely fashion while visiting centers of unemployment. His tour among the unemployed was above politics ". . . because the problem is far too serious," he explained. Avoidance of politics in dealing with domestic economic questions was just as necessary as a common stand in foreign affairs: "We ought to bury our politics."

The strong and coarse-grained threaten harshly to bury their enemies. Is it the weak, or the sensitive, or the disingenuous who here cry out instead, "Let us bury our politics"?

* W. W. Rostow, *The United States in the World Arena* (Harper, 1960, pages 524–525).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II The Economy

FOR NEARLY A CENTURY, since the readjustment following the end of the Civil War, output in the American economy has risen, in the average year, about 3.3 per cent in total and 1.7 per cent per capita. The fifteen years 1946–60 do not depart significantly from this average. Only the myopic eye of partisanship divides these fifteen years into an active (Truman) period of satisfactory growth and an indolent (Eisenhower) period of stagnation. The difference is narrower, and quite specific. There was indeed a sharp rise in national production during the Truman administration. It occurred from 1949 to 1953, and was powered primarily by increasing military expenditure. Eisenhower did reverse this. His administration brought the share of national output devoted to defense down gradually from 13.5 per cent to 9 per cent. Apart from consequences attributable to the reversal in military spending, the growth of the American economy was broadly of one pattern during the whole fifteen-year period.

And throughout those years, the received publicists of American society did not tire of announcing that the United States had conquered unemployment. These announcements bear witness to the traumatic impact, on many minds, of the mass unemployment of the 1930's. But, except for the 1930's (and perhaps other less well-documented periods of exceptional distress), unemployment has not been notably less in the United States since World War II than in earlier periods. In the first thirty years of this century, American unemployment averaged about 4.5 per cent of the labor force. For the fifteen years beginning with 1946, unemployment has also averaged just above 4.5 per cent! There has been no measurable improvement.

With a labor force of 73 million persons, the United States in 1960 had a national income approaching $420 billion. Yet, in my judgment, this American society is not usefully called "affluent." The greater number of its people have no sense of affluence, or security, or ease. The median family income is about $100 a week. One-quarter of the population has no liquid assets beyond the cash in its pockets; three-fifths of all families have liquid assets of less than $500. The majority have no reserve with which to meet a major illness and no margin to contribute significantly toward the cost of sending a son or daughter to college. America also has no respected tradition of what Thoreau called "voluntary poverty." The publicists who launched the slogan of affluence would be horrified by the prospect of themselves having to live on the representative income of an American family. We may regard their conduct and give little weight to their slogan.

In our society, property remains a great source of power and perhaps the surest support of personal independence. The common phrase "independent means" is not without its truth. How often one finds that the Assistant Secretary or the General Counsel or the Congressman who displays more independence and personal dignity happens to be the one who inherited a million dollars or, second best, accumulated a private fortune before entering politics. Those without means may offset their lack. They may have talents or friends. They may have a derivative strength from institutions and organizations. They may even, by the grace of God, have character. But, in a society where all are declared equal, they are among the less equal. Many felt this poignantly in the election campaign of 1960, when $200,000,000 is estimated to have been spent. This is a trifling amount in relation to the interests at stake, but even his small share could not have seemed trifling to the impecunious candidate.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The American economy also houses large — though loosely demarcated — groups of Strangers to the City. About 3½ million families and 4 million unattached individuals have incomes under $40 a week. One-third of these families are farm operators; the rest are farm laborers, unskilled employees in the service trades, factory workers without seniority, and the traditional unfortunates—the aged, the ill, the crippled, the widow and orphan. (Many are twice Strangers—Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Mexicans.) Seniority is increasingly important in the economy. The depressed classes have accordingly, as a group, no prospect of approximating the present normal income of Americans except in a period of rapid economic growth, when the demand for labor is high. And now, with the coming of age of the war-born population, the company of Strangers is being enlarged by a new element. In the decade of the 1960's, the American labor force will grow by about 1,400,000 persons a year. But only 700,000 civilian jobs were added in the average year of the past decade. Can it be that the young will increasingly become the new Strangers of the American economy?

Certain sociologists have advanced a caricature of American society at the beginning of the 1960's. It shows, at the base, a mass of isolated, frightened, and security-seeking individuals. Immediately above are three linked bureaucracies—of business, civil government, and military affairs. At the top, a three-branched Power Elite governs all. This caricature is not, however, an aid to understanding. In the actual American society of the 1960's, power is partly aggregated, partly atomized, partly non-existent. Not everyone is under the daily orders of one of the great bureaucracies; there are 4¾ million nonfarm businesses, 4½ million farms, and perhaps a million persons self-employed in the liberal professions. The American economy is surely the greatest achievement of American man. (It would have filled Marx with wonder and admiration.) But its distinctive strength does not lie in general policies, whether supposedly formulated by government or by business. The economy is not guided generally by the federal government, or by the 200 largest corporations, or by arrangements among these. Government authorities strike a grave pose when they are doing nothing, which deceives. Policies exist, but rarely one effective policy. Impersonal market forces play a great role alongside a congeries of public and private administrations.

III Unemployment

When President Kennedy was inaugurated, there were more people unemployed in the United States than at any time since Pearl Harbor. There was also more idle plant capacity. Full employment would have increased annual national output by perhaps $75 billion and tax revenue by about $25 billion. The Kennedy call for sacrifice—if it is for the sacrifice imposed by scarcity —is misunderstanding or masochism or histrionics.

Unemployment has risen with each United States business cycle since the early 1950's. In the 1951–53 expansion, unemployment stabilized below 2 million, touching a low point of 2.6 per cent of the labor force. In the 1955–57 upswing, unemployment stabilized below 3 million, and in the 1959–60 recovery below 4 million. The unemployed now number about 5¾ million. Disregarding the usual winter increase, the unemployed are now about 7 per cent of the national labor force. In a dozen states, they are over 10 per cent. Part time, short time, and slack work now also account for about as much production loss as complete unemployment.

The words "full employment," like "recession" or "depression," are inherently imprecise. In comparison with England or France, the more sharply dispersed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seasons which characterize the vast area of the United States add substantially to unavoidable unemployment. The easier dismissal practices of American business also swell the minimum. Taking account of these factors, I would say that employment is approaching the "full" in the United States when unemployment is recorded around 2.5 per cent (seasonally adjusted). In wartime, unemployment stayed below 2 per cent for three years.

In 1958, when unemployment was at its highest since 1941, the American system for compensating the unemployed paid benefits to only three out of every five unemployed persons. An average of 4,681,000 people were recorded officially as unemployed, but in the representative week only 2,766,000 were receiving unemployment compensation. Today the position is worse. In 1960 only half of the unemployed received compensation. American complacency at having achieved the Welfare State is premature.

Also in 1958, the total paid out in unemployment compensation was $3,892,000,000—about $16 per week when averaged over all the unemployed. This overall average is, of course, so low because many received nothing. The unemployed may perhaps be pardoned for thinking that they should have received at least twice as much as they did. As it is, unemployment insurance fails to meet its stated twin objectives: compensation to all those on whom our society imposes unemployment and a contribution to stabilizing consumer demand when the normal flow of earned income diminishes. An average payment to all unemployed of $33 per week would have meant a total 1958 expenditure of $8 billion. The year 1961 may easily make an equal claim.

The number of unemployed who received compensation was enlarged in 1958 by special temporary legislation. In this, Kennedy has followed Eisenhower. The bill passed by Congress in March extends the period of compensation to the unemployed by a maximum of 13 weeks. No other benefits are provided—neither broader coverage of occupations, nor the inclusion of the employees of smaller firms, nor a higher scale of payments. Thus, so far as compensation to the unemployed is concerned, the New Frontier in its first phase follows on the heels of the old frontier.

IV Taxation

IN COUNTER-RECESSIONARY tax policy also, Kennedy has followed closely the path marked out by Eisenhower. The second Eisenhower recession began in the third quarter of 1957. Less than a year later the President announced triumphantly that recovery had begun—without a federal tax adjustment. Kennedy has claimed a similar boon. The present recession began in the second quarter of 1960. And Kennedy has announced he will wait until April 1961 before considering any counter-recessionary tax move. His reaction time will then be as fast as Eisenhower's. Will the fates grant him a triumphant announcement?

Unfortunately in taxation the United States has a problem of long-run fit as well as of specific recessions. The fluctuations of American economic activity in the past fifteen years suggest that the present tax system (federal, state, and local) would allow for demand adequate to create full employment if public expenditures for goods and services were somewhere near $20 billion higher annually than they now are.* In an alternative system, a much

* This allows for the tax reductions of the Revenue Act of 1954, without which the need for public expenditure would be much greater.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lower schedule of tax rates would also be compatible with full employment; such an alternative would yield a much higher level of *private* spending with public expenditure remaining at the present level. Now the federal tax system yields a revenue surplus at a national income level corresponding to 85 or 90 per cent of capacity. The revenue surplus brakes expansion to a stop far before full employment is reached.

Sharp eyes may have been required to detect the misfitting of the revenue system in 1954–57. Paced by the 8-million-automobile-year 1955, there occurred an unusual bulge in consumers' demand for durable goods. Business management prebuilt facilities for several years ahead rather than forgo the special tax reductions designed to assist the Korean remobilization. Nevertheless, owing principally to the decline in federal expenditures, even at the 1957 cyclical peak there was 50 per cent more unemployment than in early 1953. In 1956 and 1957, a federal budgetary surplus emerged with the economy operating substantially below full employment. The danger signal should have been apparent to an alert eye.

But it took no sharp vision to see the perverse action of federal tax revenues in 1959–60. Consumers' expenditures on durable goods did not bulge. Business investment remained sluggish because there was still a long way to go to achieve full utilization of existing capacity. Federal government expenditures would have had to be about $30 billion higher in 1959–60 than they actually were to make the same percentage demand on the national output as they did in 1953. A budget surplus emerged in the fiscal year 1960, when output was perhaps $50 billion below a full employment level. Clearly, with *this* level of public expenditure, *this* intensity of business drive to invest, and *this* pattern of consumers' demand, our revenue system acts to brake the expansion in economic activity to a stop long before we reach full employment. The capacity of the economy has grown since 1953 far more rapidly than the demands on that capacity. The tax brake is too tight.

Apart from general re-sizing of the revenue system, the United States needs —more urgently—a specific business cycle tax adjustment. For this, the federal individual income tax is the appropriate base. At full employment it would yield well over $50 billion. But the federal income tax will never perform as a stabilizer unless it is redesigned to embody principles broadly similar to the following:

1. The present individual income tax schedule of liabilities should be designated, by statute, as constituting the Normal and related to Normal unemployment.

2. When, for any consecutive three months, unemployment shall have been officially reported as greater than 5 per cent (seasonally adjusted), for the next three months the lawful tax liability (both in withholding and final computation) shall first be computed as Normal and then reduced by 25 per cent.

3. Tax liabilities shall revert to the Normal when, for three consecutive months, unemployment will have been not more than 5 per cent.

The impact of such a system would be, both by anticipation and demand stimulation, to diminish the volume of unemployment and shorten the periods in which other than Normal tax levels operated.

Temporary tax reductions, though widely recognized to be desirable during recent recessions, were delayed or avoided (except in 1954 when the change was not temporary) because of the anticipated difficulty of securing new legislation to again increase taxes when the recession had passed. The automatic feature of the above redesign removes this difficulty. It deliberately avoids the granting of any discretionary power to the President. Such discretion is unnecessary and undesirable. The United States needs tax institutions that function properly without reliance on the initiative of a great Leader.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

V Public Expenditure

WE SHALL AGAIN understand Kennedy better if we look first at Eisenhower. Several academic economists have reported Eisenhower a convert to Keynesian economics. They find proof of this conversion in his having allowed federal spending to rise in the 1957–58 recession without moving for an increase in taxes. The report of Eisenhower's conversion surely reflects the hunger for consensus that affects our academies. But does it testify responsibly to anything else?

Let us measure from the peak of the cycle 1954–57, the first half of 1957. After that, federal spending for goods and services (in constant prices) did not rise for the three quarters in which business was contracting. Then Eisenhower announced that the recession had turned into recovery. Subsequently there were small increases in federal spending for goods and services—smaller than the increase since 1957 in population! On the other hand, there *was* a distinguishable rise during the 1957-58 recession in federal grants and transfer payments. But, in these also, the higher levels of federal spending were reached only late in 1958 and in 1959—after the recession had been officially called off. In the fiscal year of acknowledged contraction (ending June 30, 1958), the federal cash deficit was in the trifling amount of one and one-half billion dollars. It was in the fiscal year following the heralded recovery that the cash deficit reached $13.1 billion!

In this perverse timing of expanded federal spending, the Kennedy administration is apparently resigned to imitating Eisenhower. Such resignation was already a puzzling aspect of the Samuelson Report, published in January of this year. While it refers vaguely to accelerating everything, the report calls for an expansion of federal spending ". . . of $3 billion to $5 billion above already planned [Eisenhower] programs in fiscal 1962." The amount of $3–$5 billion is trifling, unless it goes with greatly expanded unemployment compensation and a tax reduction of at least $10 billion. But even this modest program was suggested only for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1961. What then was to be done in the five months to the end of June? Almost nothing.

Throughout this first phase, President Kennedy has kept up a great flow of special messages and televised press conferences. These have contributed much to the public impression of alertness and responsible action. But they have added almost nothing to immediate federal spending. On February 9 the Secretary of the Treasury explained that all the Kennedy administration measures —administrative and legislative—would add two or three hundred million dollars to federal spending in the fiscal year ending June 30, 1961. This amount is a flyspeck on the Eisenhower budget of $78,945,000,000. A few days later, in addressing a national conference of manufacturers, President Kennedy took care to play down also the magnitude of his remoter spending plans. The amount of $3 billion, Kennedy said, would be ". . . enough to pay the federal share of all our anti-recession, health, and education proposals for the next fiscal year and still have enough left over to start closing . . . the missile gap." Eisenhower had increased federal cash payments to the public by $11.4 billion in the fiscal year 1959, the *second* fiscal year of his recession. Here was Kennedy suggesting that, for him, something like $3 billion would do well enough in the fiscal year 1962, the second year of *his* recession. "I shall increase federal spending far less," the President was saying to the assembled manufacturers, "in my recession than Ike did in his."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VI Monetary Policy

IN MONETARY POLICY, the declared objectives of the Kennedy administration are two and, in appearance, simple. The first objective is to raise short-term interest rates. Thereby it is hoped to hold in the United States money that might otherwise move abroad and so deplete United States gold holdings. The second objective is to lower long-term interest rates. Thereby it is hoped to decrease the cost of mortgages on new housing and also the cost of loans floated by utilities, industry, and public authorities.

The first objective is easy to achieve and of limited—even questionable—value. The Treasury can pay more on short-term issues; the Federal Reserve will help it to pay more; no lender will object to receiving more. But the positive achievement from all this increasing of interest charges will be very limited. Higher short-term interest rates will keep in the United States some money that would otherwise move abroad. So long as the money consists only of monetary reserves (principally of foreign banks and treasuries), it performs no function particularly useful to the United States economy even when it is here. But the holding of this money in the United States does keep under American title some gold that would otherwise pass to foreign title. And the preservation of this American title quiets the fears of a public whom its supposed betters have taught to be frightened by gold outflows resulting from mere international transfers of money.

The second objective is quite another matter. Powerful lenders have to be induced to take less interest. That would demand a rare combination of monetary expertise and political toughness. The Kennedy administration would have to fight hard battles against many whom it wishes to induce to be its friends. The government of the United States would have to become a more active lender of last resort—and at sharply lower rates than now prevail. The lower rates required are not in the dimension of the publicized presidential reduction of ¼ per cent in Federal Housing Administration loan rates.* In this case, the Samuelson Report was realistic. It recommended a 4½ per cent mortgage rate. That is a full 1¼ per cent below the present (inclusive of the ¼ per cent insurance charge).

Much of the immediate advantage of reducing long-term interest rates is lost when reductions are made inch by inch. Any prospective builder who can delay is inhibited from borrowing by high interest rates that are slowly tilting downwards, as in recent months. Will he not get better terms if he waits a few months longer? If reduction is to be of counter-recessionary value, long-term interest rates need to be brought down sharply and swiftly, to the point where prospective borrowers see that the next significant movement can only be upward. Then alone have the monetary conditions been created for a spurt in the construction of houses and of other long-lived facilities, where cost is substantially influenced by changes in long-term interest rates. This is definitely a tiger who is not wisely killed inch by inch.

Forces of the first magnitude are arrayed in combat over any reduction in interest rates. In the past fifteen years, there has been a great strengthening of the interest-receiving, rentier element in the American economy. From 1946 through 1960 the dollar amount of the national income increased by 125 per cent, and total debt increased about 122 per cent. But the interest income of individuals

* Only nominally as much as ¼ per cent—because partly offset immediately through discounting mortgages $1.50 per $100 of face value.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

plus the *net* interest received by businesses, taken together, increased by 325 per cent. Interest is therefore greatly more important now, as a source of income, than it was fifteen years ago. The interest item in the national income for 1960 was $46 billion. It is the power behind this $46 billion that the Kennedy administration is challenging when it moves to lower interest charges.

Higher interest rates account for the strengthening of the rentier element in the American economy—higher rates and not the popularly lamented increase in the principal amount of debt. The rise in rates has been spectacular. In January 1960 long-term interest rates were about twice as high as in 1946, and short-term rates approximately three times as high.

The new, higher level of interest charges has gradually been built into the social structure of American income and employment. Those banks which can legally do so, now, pay their depositors higher interest. The depositors consist of that more weighty two-fifths of the population which owns more than $500 worth of financial assets per family. In addition, banks and insurance companies and other financial intermediaries have proliferated employees and offices. They added 75 per cent to their personnel from 1946 to 1959, when total United States employment increased only 16 per cent. The vested interest in high rates of interest is of many kinds!

VII Welfare Programs

THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION has already proposed more enlargement of federal welfare programs than Eisenhower did in eight years. Some enlargements will be warmly contested. Yet they involve only slight changes in the face of the American economy. New federal expenditures would be less than $3 billion annually—perhaps a half per cent of gross national product capacity in 1962.

The measure longest under consideration involves no federal spending. It would raise the minimum wage, in occupations which are covered, to $1.25 per hour. The present version of this measure (H.R. 3935) provides for reaching $1.25 in 1963 and adding coverage for large enterprises in retail trade and services. As always, the increased minimum wage will make some subnormal workers totally unemployable. But it is a helpful crutch for the valuable worker who is unorganized, weak, and exploited.

Almost as old is the proposed "distressed areas" legislation. Its significance is more political than economic. No important money is involved. Some $400 million would be provided permanently, for three revolving loan funds, a grant fund, and other things. The mechanism (H.R. 2510, especially Sec. 7) makes it unlikely that $100 million can be spent in the first year.

Of far greater and speedier consequence is the proposed liberalization of social security retirement benefits. A widow would be allowed 85 per cent of her husband's benefit. The minimum for a retired worker would be raised to $43 a month. The modesty of these benefits caused the President to exclaim, "We wish it could be raised higher. . . ."

More subject to controversy were the President's two larger proposals, in the matters of health and education. The American people now spend about $25 billion annually for each. The President's proposals might add 4 per cent to that figure. Most of the increase in health services would go for medical payments for those over sixty-five. These are indeed sadly needed. And there would also be some new money for medical research, education, and care. Elementary and secondary education would be assisted by three-quarters of a billion dollars annually —all in grants to the states for public schools. The private and parochial schools

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were deliberately left out—one answer to the religious issue. College education would be assisted by grants of about $115 million annually for scholarships and also by a $50 million per year enlargement in loans for college construction. The grants for scholarships, which leave the scholar his own choice of college, are a particularly happy step. All this is proposed—none of it yet done, but it is a safe forecast that a large part will be enacted. Speaker Sam Rayburn does not find the health proposals radical, and he is a valuable weathervane.

Characteristically, the tax associated with these welfare proposals is a payroll tax. The cumulative effect of the President's recommendations would be to increase the tax eventually to 10 per cent, paid half by the employer and half by the employee. This 10 per cent would apply on the first $5,000 of wages and salaries, on no higher segment of any wage or salary, and on no other form of income. This is, I believe, in full accord with the fiscal gospel according to Galbraith. He has written, "In the affluent society no useful distinction can be made between luxuries and necessities." Galbraith was there specifically endorsing the sales tax, and he was rejecting the idea that a general sales tax might, at least, usefully exempt food and clothing. Has regressive taxation ever been defended by a more plausible professor?

President Kennedy has even, in connection with his welfare programs, specifically echoed the authoritarian thinking which is so consistent a feature of *The Affluent Society.** When questioned regarding tax reduction, Mr. Kennedy replied, in substance, "To what purpose? If people have another $3 billion, they will spend it, and the country will have nothing to show for it. The government can keep the money and spend it for health and education. Then the country will be further ahead." Mr. Kennedy's clock kept poor time. When he spoke there was so much slack in the economy that it was possible to increase *both* public and private spending substantially by tens of billions. But the indifferent economics was less disturbing than the authoritarian tone. "Individuals spend money on mere frippery and trumpery. Government makes the good choices. Big Brother knows best."

VIII Beyond the First Phase

IN THIS FIRST phase of his White House career, President Kennedy has warmed hearts and lifted spirits. "A country," said Mazzini, with more emotion than precision, "is a fellowship of free and equal men bound together in a brotherly concord of labor toward a single end. . . ." President Kennedy has, in these several weeks, given some a Mazzinian sense of country. Many reacted with religious awe to his inaugural address. Obviously, for them, he touched, if only with grazing fingers, the mystic chords of memory (invoked, by Lincoln, on just this occasion of a First Inaugural, a hundred years ago).

What he has constructed in these several weeks seems, however, a passive and fragile amity, not a working politics. The elders of the Democratic party accord Mr. Kennedy every public deference conventionally granted the President of the United States. But they do little on his account which they would not have done equally for Mr. Eisenhower. *"Und der Koenig absolut, wenn er unseren Willen tut."* Mr. Kennedy is also not the favorite of the liberals in his own party. He has avoided identification with them, and they are cool toward him. Moreover, the President has made no move to construct a new kind of national and popular Demo-

* In this I would warmly agree with most of what Mr. Ernest van den Haag has so well written in his article, "Affluence, Galbraith, the Democrats," in the September 1960 issue of COMMENTARY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cratic party, which might serve him as a personal base of political strength. On the contrary, he has conducted himself in a manner quite incompatible with any such radical innovation, which would challenge profoundly the sovereignties, in their several states, of the Senators and Congressmen of his own party.

Can it be that Mr. Kennedy has been making himself everybody's popular President and failing to establish any distinctive bases of political strength? Time will answer. Today, however, it seems not unlikely that, in domestic political authority, Mr. Kennedy, during the next four years, will be more nearly in the position of Harry Truman than of Franklin Roosevelt. Mr. Kennedy does not emerge from the smashing victory of the election of 1932 or of 1936. And he will not, presumably, be a President of the United States in time of war.

The Eisenhower administration contributed to discrediting the political capacity of American business and its counselors (frequently lawyers). The Kennedy administration has now taken the first steps toward making a similar contribution to discrediting the American liberal intelligentsia (also with its lawyers). I cannot believe that either of these contributions is an unmixed blessing. Whom shall it profit if it is made clear that the Professor of Economics, in public office, is as superficial, timorous, and ineffective as was the Vice President in Charge of Sales? These are fears, not finalities. The Professor may still save his own soul—and do something worthwhile for his country. But the first signs are not good.

For economic recovery, President Kennedy has, in this first phase, projected little and accomplished almost nothing. His program for unemployment compensation is meager. He has no counter-recessionary tax policy He proposes only a trifling immediate expansion in federal spending. His monetary policy cannot be relied upon to make a large contribution to recovery. His welfare programs would provide small stimulus in an economy where the margin below full employment output is in the range of $75 billion annually. His proposed reduction of corporate income taxes, for firms with a high level of investment, is also of more political than economic importance under current circumstances.

It is always possible that the whole outlook will be quickly, and drastically, transformed by a major deterioration of the international position. Then 1961–63 may copy the rearmament simplicities of 1951–53. Or there may be far worse things. Barring such transformations, it cannot be very long before President Kennedy comes to see that his present economic program amounts to very little.

At that time, he will reach—if he has not reached already—the issue of purpose. What does he wish? If he desires merely to be President, he can have that with a relatively quiet life. Eisenhower did. Will Kennedy, at that point, allow himself, in his own mind, to recognize clearly the unserious and even trifling character of his present economic program? Or will he muddle his own thought, accept the tortured estimations of that majority of Organization Men with whom every President is surrounded, and obfuscate and temporize—beguiled and beguiling, deceiving himself and cajoling others? And if he does decide to attempt something more serious in economic policy, how will he then go about building the requisite political strength?

There is an easier alternative. That is to act like President Eisenhower—but more skillfully. Ignore unpleasant facts. Accept what the Democrats called "high level stagnation" when Eisenhower was in the White House. The same condition can be called affluence. And deft hands can garland it with the uncostly flowers of familiar welfare programs.

Which alternative will President Kennedy choose? Nothing in the experience of the First Phase gives us sufficient grounds for a confident answer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NATHAN GLAZER

THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN AMERICA – 1961

WHY is it that the peace movement in America has never been able to attract the kind of mass support which has gathered around the peace movement in England? The danger of nuclear war is the greatest political issue of our time. And it is an issue whose main outlines are by no means difficult to grasp. The weapons, we are told again and again, can easily wipe out the populations of even the biggest countries many times over. This is so far from being an alarmist or unduly pessimistic estimate that nowadays we call someone an optimist who believes that enough people may survive a nuclear war to rebuild civilization within ten or twenty years. We get more and more evidence all the time that the weapons can travel to any place on earth from any other place in a matter of minutes, making ridiculous all ideas of evacuation. The major defense measure so far proposed—and it is only a proposal, before whose scale and implications most people fall silent—is to abandon the surface of the earth itself and move everything (Dr. Teller most recently includes supermarkets) into enormous caverns dug deep below the ground. One wonders whether even these caverns would survive the holocausts which the larger nuclear weapons are capable of producing. And in these circumstances national defense policy consists of constructing ever more powerful, better protected, more certain, and undeflectable missiles. Does anyone recall that only twenty-five years ago it was considered criminal to assault civilian populations from the air (Guernica)?

"We know, with the certainty of—what shall I call it?—statistical truth that if enough of these weapons are made—by enough different states—some of them are going to blow up. Through accident or folly or madness. . . ." Thus C.P. Snow, who is not known as an extremist, a fanatic, or a pacifist.

The American response to these quite definite facts has been extraordinarily sluggish. One group argues that despite the existence and perfection of weapons capable of killing almost everyone on earth, it is not "certain" they will be set off through "accident or folly or madness"—though we have surely seen enough of all three operating in human history. Another group—apparently neither foolish nor mad—contends that it may actually be necessary to use the weapons; and that the only or best way to combat Communism is by means of a policy which envisages as a possibility the resort to mass extermination. While this group concludes by rational analysis that at some point the interests of freedom and justice will in some way be advanced by a decision that

NATHAN GLAZER, formerly an associate editor of COMMENTARY, is also a regular contributor. His book, *The Social Basis of American Communism*, will be issued soon by Harcourt, Brace & World; and he is now engaged on another book, dealing with the ethnic groups of New York City. Mr. Glazer is active in the Committee of Correspondence, one of the groups mentioned in the present article.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

condemns most Americans, as well as most Russians, to death, yet a third group—represented, for example, by the New York *Daily News,* America's largest newspaper—continues to present a streak of ignorant belligerence, which reminds one of the bar drunk who says, "Let's drop a few on them and get it over with."

This is not the whole story of the American response to the threat of nuclear war, for a peace movement has also come into being in recent years. It has, however, failed to grow beyond a certain limited point. It has not stimulated enough people into trying their hands at activating the passive, disputing with the reasoners, and arguing with the bar drunks; and it has made no impact on policy. The need being so great, what has prevented the American peace movement from attracting mass support?

I INCLUDE IN THE notion of a "peace movement" individuals and organizations representing a wide spectrum of positions. There are the absolute pacifists, who of course oppose war in any form; there are the nuclear pacifists, who advocate the unilateral renunciation of nuclear weapons; and there are those who stop short of urging unilateral nuclear disarmament, but who feel that first steps must immediately be taken, either through negotiated agreement or, if necessary, unilateral action, to reduce the chance that these weapons will ever be used. Some organizations—like the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy and the small Committee of Correspondence recently organized by David Riesman, Erich Fromm, A. J. Muste, and others—embrace people along this entire spectrum of positions. Others have a narrower membership. On the "left," there are the Peacemakers and the newer Committee for Non-Violent Action,* which include those militant civil disobedience pacifists who will not pay their taxes, who board Polaris submarines, climb over barbed wire into the restricted areas where weapons are kept, and try to sail boats into the dangerous seas where atom bomb tests are scheduled. Apart from these, there are the long established pacifist groups (more or less supporting the Committee for Non-Violent Action): the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which has a strong religious tendency; the War Resisters League, somewhat more politically radical and less religious; and the American Friends Service Committee, which is the largest—in terms of staff and resources—and in some ways the most conservative. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, founded almost fifty years ago by Jane Addams, may also be listed here; it is not primarily a pacifist group, but it works closely with pacifists. There are, finally, groups which have become active in the colleges—most significantly the new Student Peace Union which is again not a pacifist group, though pacifists are prominent in its ranks. All these groups are linked by individuals who are active in two or more of them, and sit on a number of boards and executive committees.

Associated more loosely with this circle of organizations, though also perhaps to be included within the idea of a "peace movement," are such organizations as the United World Federalists and the American Association for a United Nations. These organizations bring us close to the world of foundations and conservative dignitaries, which is of a very different kind from what I think of as the peace movement proper.

The most prominent organization within the peace movement is the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, which—in the manner of other voluntary non-partisan citizens' groups that have played an important role in American history—has tried to get as large a number of people as possible to do something about the threat of atomic warfare. Last spring,

* This committee was originally designed to coordinate the actions of different pacifist groups, but it has developed into a partially independent body, initiating demonstrations of its own.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

two and a half years after it began, SANE held a rally in New York that filled Madison Square Garden and the surrounding streets with thousands of people, all of whom were willing to pay admission, and most of whom made additional contributions at the meeting. The speakers included Walter Reuther, G. Mennen Williams, Alf Landon, and Norman Thomas, and for a moment it looked as though SANE might grow into a really powerful force in American politics. Alas, it did not. The reasons for this failure are worth trying to determine, for they tell us a great deal about the difficulties that the peace movement in general has had to contend with in this country.

THE FORMATION of SANE in 1957 was originally spurred less by the threat of general atomic war itself than by a concern over the danger to life and health posed by the fall-out from atomic testing. Those who organized SANE—and they included some of the scientists who had never given up the active and responsible search for the means of control and elimination of the frightful new weapons —were interested in the whole range of problems raised by the threat of war between the great powers. But it was the issue of nuclear testing—dramatized by the contamination of a good part of Japan's food supply by fall-out—that made it possible to bring together a large circle of people representing many tendencies. This seemed the most fruitful issue at the time, for informed public opinion was unaware of how close we were to the development of operational long-range ballistic missiles, and it was therefore still possible to minimize the danger of a nuclear war's being set off by accident. In those pre-missile days, the weapons could only be carried by relatively slow planes, rather elaborate measures were required to launch an attack, and in general many unlikely events would have had to occur for a major accident to take place. Against planes, moreover, one could think of real defense, not simply the instinctive reaction of the scorpion who kills himself in the act of killing: huge radar warning systems and anti-aircraft rockets might have been partially effective. And then, too, while planes were on their leisurely eight- or ten-hour trip to New York or to Moscow, there would presumably have been time for negotiations to be held and common sense to prevail.

Under such circumstances, the threat of genetic damage and contamination of the food supply from testing seemed rather more urgent to many people than the threat of wholesale slaughter. Indeed, most of SANE's propaganda in 1957 and 1958 dealt principally with the matter of contamination and genetic damage. But after Russia and America both suspended atomic testing in 1958, this issue gradually lost its immediacy, and when Russia sent up the first Sputnik and the ICBM became a reality, a much greater issue emerged: the possibility of damage to the human race on a scale that neither man nor nature had produced since the beginning of civilization.

While the danger of nuclear annihilation was indeed a new issue, there were people and organizations already in existence ready to take it up on the basis of old programs—non-violence, or socialism, or world government, or some such other ideal. Thus SANE, while it was a new organization formed for the purpose of dealing with a new issue, was actually based on a coalition of two major groupings, both of which had their origins in older issues: the proponents of world government on the one hand and the pacifists on the other. Norman Cousins, one of SANE's two co-chairmen, had long been associated with the United World Federalists, while the other, Clarence Pickett, was head of the American Friends Service Committee.

Obviously SANE would have had problems in extending its influence no matter who had organized it, and even if the co-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chairmen had been, say, George Kennan and Reinhold Niebuhr (leaving aside the question of whether either would then—or even now—have agreed to head such a movement). Nevertheless, the base on which SANE was built did create certain special problems that partially account for its failure to become a major force. Neither world federalists nor pacifists have had much of a reputation for political wisdom among people who concern themselves professionally with world affairs, whether as commentators, journalists, scholars, or government officials. They have, in fact, been considered—though with less than perfect justification—woolly-minded. And, indeed, perhaps the best sign that SANE could have exercised greater political sagacity was its selection of two names like Cousins and Pickett to act as chairmen.

Let me emphasize that I mean no derogation of these men, who deserve the greatest credit for responding so early with urgency and passion to the danger of nuclear annihilation. Under their leadership, SANE was able to attract many people who had never been either world federalists or pacifists, and it soon had more than a hundred local groups, in many important cities in the country. But at the same time it was relatively weak in attracting persons expert in the analysis of international affairs, and its public statements—which reflected both the moral passion of its chief figures and their tendency to political vagueness—shied away on the whole from analysis of the political factors that many people felt would have to be essential elements in any discussion of atomic warfare or disarmament.

Another problem SANE faced was the complexity of the issues with which it was trying to cope. Those committees which have in the past had a great impact on American policy (for example, the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies, or the National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing) have been aided by the clarity and simplicity of the goals they were working for, and of the measures necessary to reach them. But how does one avoid atomic war? And thinking of this question as a form of the older and larger questions of how to avoid war in general or how to get international government, made it even more difficult for SANE to arrive at the kind of simple, programmatic demands which a citizens' committee is best equipped to push. Consequently, aside from its specific and effective attack against the threat of contamination and genetic damage from atomic testing, SANE found it hard to formulate policies, and its advertisements and announcements suffered not only from the political vagueness that might be part of the heritage of the world government and pacifist movements, but also from the vagueness inherent in an attack on a problem of enormous scope.

If SANE was inevitably affected by the special experience and outlook of those who organized it, it was also affected by the special experience and outlook of many who joined it. Before the formation of SANE—that is, before 1957, when the Soviet Union drew close in atomic capacity to the United States—the peace movement was, in the eyes of many people (and in some measure in reality), a creature of Russian foreign policy. So long as the Soviet Union suffered from atomic inferiority, it was to its interest to support movements denouncing the possession of nuclear weapons and arousing world opinion on a massive scale against the possibility of their use. (The fact that all morality and sense agreed in this case with the Soviet Union was accidental.) In 1956, it was the Russian-dominated World Peace Council which grew out of the Stockholm peace petition that gained publicity, while the public remained generally ignorant of the existence of the small pacifist groups which had never been influenced by Communists. By 1957, many new voices were being raised, independently of the Com-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

munists and their followers on the one side, and the pacifists on the other, pointing out that the threat to life raised a question greater than the conflict between dictatorship and democracy*—a fact which saved the peace issue from becoming a captive of the Communists and which has also permitted SANE to recruit a certain measure of support outside pacifist and world federalist circles. However, this fact did not prevent a large number of people from joining who had the habit of thinking on certain essential issues in ways that were often indistinguishable from the views of Communists.

Who were these people? Some were former Communists who had left the party as a result of Khrushchev's speech exposing Stalin's crimes and the suppression of the Hungarian revolution; others were ex-Communists of an older vintage who were no longer under party discipline but whose political orientation was largely unchanged; most perhaps were people who had never been Communists but whose view of the world was molded by such publications as the *National Guardian* and the *Monthly Review*. What these groups had in common was a stubborn belief that the Russian or Chinese or Yugoslav or Cuban dictatorships were in some sense superior "socialist" societies, worthy of a special loyalty from the progressive-minded, and infinitely superior to American "capitalism."

One of the most serious problems that any movement like SANE must face in the United States today is the existence of these large numbers of people who think to some extent like Communists. I put the matter this way because I do not believe —and no informed observer believes— that the actual participation in SANE of Communist party members under party discipline and orders has been at all extensive or important. In the case of a small group (and a new group will have to be small at first) fighting for measures which have the incidental effect of criticizing American foreign and defense policy, it is inevitable that the "Communist-minded," as we may call them, will enter and become active. In SANE, they were particularly active in New York.

The SANE leaders were perfectly well aware of the threat posed to any independent organization by members of the Communist party (the national board included a number of knowledgeable and well-known anti-Communists, for example Norman Thomas and Victor Reuther). But a more serious problem was raised by those people who were no longer or who had never been actual Communists, but who were temperamentally and intellectually committed to a fellow-traveling interpretation of world affairs. The presence of large numbers of people of the type I have described in some local SANE groups meant that a tone was established which could only repel sophisticated anti-Communists who might have wished to work for disarmament. It also repelled the broad mass of Americans and made the peace movement suspect in influential political quarters. The fact that SANE's statements eschewed simple political realities and analyses in favor of vague references to the virtues of a stronger UN, or world law and world government, made it easier for the "Communist-minded" to enter.

SANE WAS ATTACKED immediately after the Madison Square Garden meeting by Senator Thomas E. Dodd of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee for permitting itself to be infiltrated by Communists. Part of its reply to Senator Dodd is worth quoting, for it was a model both in tone and substance of what such a reply should be:

* Note an American Catholic opinion of 1958: "It would seem . . . that the nuclear weapons are too violent and far-reaching in their effects to be morally justifiable as legitimate weapons of defense. It is hard to believe that in any future large-scale war the use of nuclear weapons will be forgone . . . wars of the future will [therefore] be wars of annihilation. . . . Such wars could never be justifiable, not even to save the Western world from becoming engulfed in the rising tide of atheistic Communism" (the Boston *Pilot*, April 26, 1958).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> As a matter of democratic principle and practice we resent the intrusion of a Congressional Committee into the affairs of an organization which during its entire life has acted only in accordance with its declared principles. . . . The Committee [SANE] itself is entirely capable of carrying out its principles and guaranteeing that it will not permit their betrayal or subversion under any pressure from, on the one hand, investigations directed to its hurt or, on the other hand, by the actions of its local chapters or their leaders.

The SANE National Committee then proceeded to adopt measures aimed at driving Communists and fellow-travelers out of the organization. In New York, the problem was aggravated by the fact that local SANE groups (there were more than fifty) were not directly chartered by the central office, as were all other groups, but rather by an intermediate Greater New York Committee.

These groups, in order to work with SANE, were now required to take out a charter with the national organization—a charter which includes the provision that "persons who are not free because of party discipline or political allegiance to criticize the actions of totalitarian nations with the same standards by which they challenge other nations will not be welcome as members." The new chartering requirement for the New York groups was denounced as a witch-hunt and a loyalty-test—and there is no question that its main purpose was to get rid of local affiliates which seemed to be dominated either by Communists or the Communist-minded.

IT IS HARD TO estimate the effect of the crisis on SANE. To begin with the negative impact: some twenty-five groups (out of perhaps fifty) in New York have refused or will refuse to request charters, and some have now organized their own Greater New York Conference of Peace Groups. There have been three resignations from the national boards and sponsoring committees, among them Professor Linus Pauling and Robert Gilmore of the American Friends Service Committee. Most important, the organization has lost support among the radical pacifists and the young people on its "left." A. J. Muste—a leading figure in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Committee for Non-Violent Action, and the pacifist world in general—has criticized the actions of the SANE national board in the magazine *Liberation,* and he has been particularly bitter over the fact that certain SANE leaders were willing to meet with a member of Senator Dodd's staff. (Senator Dodd had also quoted Mr. Cousins as saying that he would be happy to cooperate with the Internal Security Subcommittee in getting rid of the Communists within the organization—though this was denied by SANE.) Muste feels that a united front with Communists in the peace movement is impossible, and he opposes it. But he believes that forthrightly stating one's position and working for it would be enough to keep Communists out; and if they did come in under such circumstances, one should hope that the environment of a non-Communist organization would change them.

Mr. Muste's position is also the position of most of the young people and students who have been so important in the various demonstrations that have brought the issue of nuclear war to the public. They feel that the action of SANE reflects caution and conservatism. Having perhaps less experience with Communists than the organization's national leadership, they fail to see that what SANE has done reflects not only political wisdom but the refusal of serious people to bother with those whose role in every organization which they cannot control must inevitably be destructive and demoralizing.

The problem posed by Communism for the peace movement, however, is more important than that represented by the small number of Communists, or even the larger number of what I have called the Communist-minded. For various rea-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sons, many of those who are neither Communist nor Communist-minded remain silent on Communism, and even tolerate the presence of Communist literature in their displays. Some of the pacifists in the American Friends Service Committee (one of the major sources of personnel, office space, and money for all sorts of peace groups) seem to feel that Christian charity forbids any action against Communists, even any comment on them.

THE HERITAGE OF the fight over McCarthyism has also affected the peace movement. Since the issue McCarthyism raised—i.e., the actual role of Communists in American culture and government—was never really clarified among liberals, but rather buried by Eisenhower's benevolent obtuseness, any attack on Communism, any attempt to dissociate oneself from and indicate one's loathing for dictatorship and lies, now appears to many old-time peace workers—and to many young people in the movement—as conformist, fearful, self-serving, a "concession to McCarthyism." By extension, even patriotism or the defense of American institutions may be seen in the same way. Communists, the Communist-minded, and anti-McCarthyites thus all unite against efforts to be matter-of-fact and truthful about Communism—which, I agree with Muste, is a far better way to keep Communists and fellow-travelers out of the peace movement than any elaborate organizational measures (though these may be necessary, too).

Interestingly enough, the one person who has been organizationally most creative and effective in the peace movement, Robert Pickus of Berkeley,* himself a pacifist for many years, has also been strongest in insisting that the peace groups must distinguish themselves from those who uphold or are tolerant of dictatorship and falsehood. Pickus has been passionate and brilliant in analyzing the problems created for pacifism and the work for peace by the moral and political failure to take a stand on Communism. Unfortunately, I do not think his point of view is particularly attractive to most of the young people who have been drawn into the more activist organizations, and who are the greatest potential resource of the movement. SANE, focusing in the past on specific issues, and finding it difficult to arouse the enthusiasm and response that are given by the young to a more total position and commitment, had tapped only part of this resource; its moves to eliminate Communists and fellow-travelers mean additional losses among these young people, because to them any action against Communists and fellow-travelers today appears to be only a cowardly response to ignorant and evil pressures.

On the other hand, SANE is now capable of appealing effectively to the politically sophisticated who before simply refused to waste their time explaining why they could not work with Communists. Indeed, SANE in general now seems to be overcoming the tradition of woolly-mindedness it inherited from the world federalist and pacifist background of its founders, and is making a real attempt to think politically on all the problems of arms control and disarmament. When one says "ban atom-bomb testing" or "disarmament is necessary," one must be prepared to go on to deal with many other questions: Are the Russians serious? What are their intentions as to expansion, warfare, and atomic weapons? What risks do we run? Can tests be monitored? etc., etc. SANE is now tackling these questions—and from the first policy papers I have seen, its reasoning is not inferior—either in point of realism or hard-headedness—to that of Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Kahn.

* His Acts for Peace center in Berkeley has brought together a wide spectrum of organizations and individuals on the principle that everyone concerned about peace can find some activity that is helpful. Thus the actions of all, from those with the mildest concern for peace to the most committed pacifists, can be focused on a common end.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TODAY, HOWEVER, a new situation confronts SANE: and that is, the far greater weight given by the new administration to a point of view similar to SANE's own—the point of view which takes the possibility of disarmament seriously. Eisenhower, as most people agree, was also serious about disarmament, but virtually nothing was done in his administration toward developing a coherent approach to the difficulties involved. None of the great interests or powers—the armed forces, the industrial complex dependent upon the military establishment, the Atomic Energy Commission, the nationalist press and Congressmen, or public opinion—which maintain the largely mindless arms race we are in, were ever confronted, reined, instructed, disciplined, in an effort to mitigate the dangers of atomic warfare. Too little mind and too little force were exerted at the center of things to affect the massive inertia in which our society is caught.

Anti-American propaganda often pictures our society as helpless before the alliance of capitalists and militarists who conspire to maintain a demand for unnecessary but increasingly dangerous goods in order to keep the system going. This is largely myth, but shortly before leaving office, President Eisenhower—in the most noteworthy statement he ever made—pointed to where the danger really lies. In calling attention to the rise of a great military establishment linked with industrial interests, Eisenhower indicated that the painful readjustments necessary to save American society may never be taken, simply because they *are* too painful. Because California needs missile contracts, American civilization may be destroyed. But if we find it impossible to act in terms of the general interests of society, if we are so irrevocably committed to the idea that a man's primary responsibility is to himself and the institution he serves as to render us incapable of the imagination and the will by which 10 per cent of the national income might be redirected from the production of weapons to the production of useful goods—then we may well be destroyed.

In appointing Jerome Wiesner as his chief scientific adviser, President Kennedy has shown that the point of view of that part of the scientific community which is not frightened by the enormous tasks of disarmament, or by the enormous efforts society must make to save itself, will now be taken very seriously indeed. The point of view on nuclear war that SANE tried to press by building a national movement has developed independently, from the logic of the situation, among small circles of scientists, who are far more influential than SANE ever was, perhaps than SANE ever could be. It would be reassuring for those of us who are committed to democracy to believe that it was the pressure of public opinion, of an instructed and informed citizenry, that led the Kennedy administration to move toward a serious approach to disarmament. Unfortunately no such interpretation will hold up. In Congress, only a tiny handful of Representatives dared to speak about disarmament and the dangers of American defense policy. In the Senate, only one voice was raised, that of Senator Humphrey, and only intermittently. In the end, the same factors that have made the Russians serious about disarmament (as several participants in the last Pugwash conference—including Jerome Wiesner and W. W. Rostow—and a number of Americans who have negotiated with the Russians, like James Wadsworth and Hans Bethe, now seem to think they are) have also made the new American administration serious about disarmament—and in neither case do they have anything to do with public opinion. The fact that Russian public opinion is powerless, while ours is free; that their peace movement is a government artifact, while ours is a spontaneous if small public movement—all this seems to mean nothing; for the great governments act today, on issues which affect the lives of us all, mainly on the basis of advice from their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scientific experts. And these experts, whether Russian or American, are beginning to speak the same language.

UNDER SUCH CONDITIONS—while committees and scientists meet to consider the atom-test ban and other possible steps toward disarmament—can the peace movement have any role to play? The answer is that it has a most important role to play, and here the difference between Russia and America is decisive. For while public opinion in both countries has contributed almost nothing to the new attitudes of government on the matter of disarmament, public opinion *can* inhibit and block effective action by the government in the United States, while it is entirely helpless, for good or ill, in Russia. Whatever the level of intelligence and knowledge on these problems among some of the President's top advisers, eventually there will be treaties that will have to go through the Senate, appropriations for arms inspection and for disarmament activities that will have to go through the House. And though the spending of a few hundred million dollars more will bother no one, the fact that at some point the defense budget may have to be cut by a few billions, will jar the inertia under which we have lived for so long. The resistance of the military and the contractors, and the workers and the communities that are dependent on the military contracts, will be enormous. People understand the possible dangers of atomic war well enough, but it appears a distant and abstract idea as against the immediate prospect of unemployment, relocation, retraining. The other side of a disarmament effort must therefore be the creation of economic plans to reassure those people who have a stake in the arms race that *they* will not become surplus along with the missiles. I have devoted much space to the political attitudes of people in the peace movement, attitudes which have certainly affected its success. But unquestionably it is this larger setting of fear and the sense of helplessness, in an industrial and commercial society which seems incapable of reacting appropriately to new situations, that is most relevant to an explanation of the failure of the peace movement to attract large numbers.

Many members of the peace movement are aware that, in addition to analyzing foreign policy and defense measures, the movement must concern itself with a larger range of problems: the problem of economic reconversion and the problem of the institutional inertia which often makes the simplest things impossibly hard to do, and hard things. . . . Well, that is the question. If they are impossible to do under present circumstances, if there is no way for the informed intelligence to penetrate into public opinion, Congress, the bureaucracies, and the institutions, then we may really be doomed. If, moreover, that should turn out to be the case, then the outlook of the extremists in the peace movement—those for whom SANE is too sober, too much concerned with political realities, too responsible, too accepting of the world as it is and of things as they are —may be the only one left for reasonable men. Many young Negroes in the South have decided that they will simply refuse to cooperate any longer with a society that degrades them, and many pacifists have reached a similar conclusion about a society that prepares to slaughter them.

Meanwhile most of the peace movement continues to work through the system and with the system, to see if intelligence can overcome a destructive course. It is still a small movement, its appeal is restricted. There are the hopeful signs of the last few years, there is the growing response from students and young people. There are, as I have pointed out, many problems, both substantive and organizational. But if an informed public opinion can be created to supplement the efforts of an informed administration, we may still be able to save ourselves.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JULIAN MAYFIELD

CHALLENGE TO NEGRO LEADERSHIP

The Case of Robert Williams

There is one, and only one, issue in the Robert Williams case. That single issue is: Shall the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People endorse the advocacy by a local NAACP officer of stopping "lynching with lynching" or "meeting violence with violence"?

—from *The Single Issue,* a pamphlet distributed at the NAACP national convention in New York, July 1959.

FOR SOME TIME NOW it has been apparent that the traditional leadership of the American Negro community—a leadership which has been largely middle class in origin and orientation—is in danger of losing its claim to speak for the masses of Negroes. This group is being challenged by the pressure of events to produce more substantial and immediate results in the field of civil rights or renounce the position it has long held. The dramatic Tuskegee and Montgomery boycotts, the rash of student sit-ins—none was inspired by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, or the established Negro church denominations, but it is to their credit that they hurriedly gave the boycotts and sit-ins their blessing and, as with the NAACP, much needed financial help. They were thereby able to present a united front to their common enemy, the system of white supremacy.

But the challenge to middle-class Negro leaders—including the newer type like Martin Luther King—remains. It is inherent in the rapid growth of the militant, white-hating Muslim movement among working-class Negroes. It can be heard in the conversations of black intellectuals and students from the South who regard the efforts of the NAACP, the Urban League, and most religious and civic leaders with either disdain or despair, in the belief that they are doing too little, too timidly and too late.

Probably nothing more clearly illustrates this challenge, however, than the case of *Wilkins vs. Williams.* Robert F. Williams is the president of the Union County, North Carolina, branch of the NAACP. *Wilkins vs. Williams* was a hearing before the board of directors of the NAACP in New York City, which grew out of three criminal cases that were disposed of in one day by the Superior Court in Monroe, the seat of Union County.

Before this court on May 5, 1959, stood James Mobley, B.F. Shaw, and Louis Medlin. Mobley, a mentally retarded colored man, was charged with assault with intent to commit rape on a white woman. (He admitted he had caught her wrist during an argument.) Shaw, a white man, was charged with assault on a Negro chambermaid who claimed he had kicked her down a flight of stairs in the hotel

JULIAN MAYFIELD has published two novels on Negro life, *The Hit* and *The Long Night;* a third, *The Grand Parade,* will be released by Vanguard this month. Mr. Mayfield also has been an actor on Broadway. This is his first contribution to COMMENTARY.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where she worked. The case of the other white defendant, Medlin, was the most inflammatory. He was accused of having entered the home of a Negro woman, eight months pregnant, of attempting to rape her, and, when she resisted and tried to flee across a field, of brutally assaulting her and her six-year-old son. A white woman neighbor had witnessed the assault and summoned the police.

The Union County branch of the NAACP is the only one of its kind now in existence. Its members and supporters, who are mostly workers and displaced farmers, constitute a well-armed and disciplined fighting unit. Union County Negroes have had more than their share of ugly race relations, and by 1959, their experience—which we shall examine in detail later—had taught them to rely on their own resources in their dealings with the white community. After Medlin was arrested, their first impulse was to mount an assault against the Monroe jail, seize the prisoner, and kill him. It was Robert Williams who restrained them. He pointed out that murdering Medlin would place them in the position of the white men who, shortly before, had dragged Mack Charles Parker from a jail in Poplarville, Mississippi, and lynched him. Besides, Williams argued, so much national and international attention was focused on Monroe that the judge and juries would be forced to punish the white men.

But Williams was wrong. Impervious to world opinion, the court freed both Shaw and Medlin, and committed the mentally retarded Negro to prison for two years. (Only the last-minute discovery by his attorney of a technicality, which reduced the charge from rape to assault, prevented the judge from handing down a thirty-year sentence.) On the steps of the courthouse, Williams issued an angry statement to a UPI reporter:

> We cannot take these people who do us injustice to the court and it becomes necessary to punish them ourselves. In the future we are going to have to try and convict them on the spot. We cannot rely on the law. We can get no justice under the present system. If we feel that injustice is done, we must right then and there, on the spot, be prepared to inflict punishment on the people.
>
> Since the federal government will not bring a halt to lynching in the South, and since the so-called courts lynch our people legally, if it's necessary to stop lynching with lynching, then we must be willing to resort to that method.

Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP, called Williams from New York to ask about the statement. Williams confirmed it as his and said he intended to repeat it that afternoon for several radio and television stations eager to interview him. He would make it clear, he assured Wilkins, that he was not speaking for the NAACP but for himself, though he would stress that his views represented the prevailing feeling of the colored people in Union County. Wilkins replied that it would be virtually impossible for the general public to separate Williams's statement from the policies of the NAACP since he would be identified as an officer of the organization. Williams then made his scheduled appearances, and the next day, May 7, Wilkins sent a telegram directing him to suspend his activities as a local officer pending consideration of his status at a meeting of the Association's board of directors. Williams answered that he would attend the meeting with counsel.

THUS THE STAGE was set for a contest between a highly respected leader of a distinguished national organization and a relatively unknown young Southener capable of issuing rash statements on the steps of a courthouse. *Wilkins vs. Williams* aroused heated discussions in nearly every Negro community in the country, but it was obvious from the beginning that Williams was bound to lose. At a closed hearing in June, before the Committee on Branches, Williams, represented by Conrad Lynn, a veteran civil-rights attorney, asserted that his statement had been made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

under emotional duress, and that he had not meant to imply that Negroes should exercise anything more than their legal right to self-defense and the right to come to the defense of another party against criminal attack. The committee upheld the action of its executive secretary and suspended Williams for six months. A few weeks later, the delegates to the Association's fiftieth annual convention voted 764 to 14 against Williams and in favor of suspension.

The one-sided vote should have settled the matter, with Williams returning to obscurity. But the questions raised by *Wilkins vs. Williams* are profound, and still far from settled. A close examination of relevant documents and newspaper files, and interviews with some of the principals involved, leads one to conclude that the real issue was never raised, and that Williams was slapped on the wrist for having stated publicly what many of his fellow Negroes, even those on the board of directors of the NAACP, felt but did not think it politic to express. Indeed, a statement issued by Roy Wilkins on May 6, 1959, deploring Williams's statement might well have been written by Williams himself.

> . . . At the same time it must be recognized that the mood of Negro citizens from one end of the nation to the other is one of bitterness and anger over the lynching [of Mack Parker] in Poplarville, Miss., April 25, and over numerous instances of injustice meted out to Negroes by the courts in certain sections of the South. They see Negroes lynched or sentenced to death for the same crimes for which white defendants are given suspended sentences or set free. They are no longer willing to accept this double standard of justice.

If Negroes were no longer willing to accept the double standard of justice, *what were they to do about it?* Wilkins did not say, but one paragraph in the brief Williams submitted to the Committee on Branches provides the answer which he has been expounding ever since and which daily finds wider and wider acceptance:

> He [Williams] believes the message of armed self-reliance should be spread among Negroes of the South. He is convinced that a somnolent national government will only take action when it is made aware that individual Negroes are no longer facing the mobs in isolation but are acquiring the habit of coming to the aid of their menaced brothers.

But this was precisely the position which the NAACP could not publicly support. The organization was already being subjected to constant harassment by the Southern states. And to have advocated Williams's position would have exposed the NAACP to widespread criticism from many of the people who now warmly support it, those who, for the most part, prefer the legalistic or pacifist approach to American race relations. Moreover, the possible resulting violence could have shaken the nation to its very foundation, and caused it intense embarrassment in the conduct of its diplomacy with a largely non-white world. But the situation in the South that provoked Williams's statement and the ensuing controversy remains unchanged. The NAACP's rejection of Williams's position only postponed the crisis facing Negro leadership; it did not eliminate it. Because it seems probable that Williams—and other young men and women like him—will play an increasingly vocal role in the social maelstrom that is the American Southland, a closer look at him, his views, and the environment that produced him, may be revealing.

I FIRST MET Robert Williams at the center of a revolution, and I am certain that this has colored my attitude toward him. It was in Havana in the summer of 1960. Relations between the Eisenhower administration and the Castro government had deteriorated almost to the breaking point. White and black leaders in the United States had already denounced Fidel Castro's efforts to win friends and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sympathy among American Negroes. Adam Clayton Powell, once a warm supporter, had disavowed the Cuban leader. Joe Louis's public relations firm, under strong public pressure, had been forced to drop its Cuban account, and Jackie Robinson had taken Castro to task in his New York *Post* column. The prominent Negroes who had flocked to Havana soon after the revolution succeeded had gone home and not returned.

Yet there at the Hotel Presidente, a guest of the Casa de las Americas, a Cuban cultural agency, was Robert Williams, a tall man in his middle thirties, of massive shoulders and thick girth. In Havana he wore the wide-brimmed hat of the *guajiro* (peasant) and a beard that would have been impressive anywhere else but in the land of Fidel Castro and his comrades. This was Williams's second visit to the island since the revolution, and he was a celebrity, applauded wherever he went. In personal appearances, and in magazine and newspaper articles, Williams had been excoriating the United States, his main charge being that America talks freedom abroad while denying it to its black citizens at home. Williams and Castro had frequently appeared together on television and a warm friendship had developed between them. The relationship had mutual advantages: the Cuban leader was furnished with a gold mine of propaganda material to use in his clash with the Eisenhower administration, and Williams had a platform from which he could speak and be heard around the world. His attacks on the United States nearly involved him in a fist fight with an American newspaperman who angrily accused him of unpatriotic behavior in airing an embarrassing domestic problem in a country that was hostile to the United States. Unwittingly the reporter had touched on one of the keystones of Williams's strategy.

"What some people don't understand," he told me one evening, "is that in the South we're fighting for our lives." He was referring to the broad economic offensive white officials and businessmen have mounted against militant Negroes throughout the South. "I'm in this struggle to win, and I'll win it any way I can. If somebody gets embarrassed, that's too bad."

An opportunity to test the effectiveness of his approach had arisen on his first trip to Cuba. A telephone call from Monroe informed him that his wife and children were receiving threats from the Ku Klux Klan. Furious, he stormed down to the United States embassy, stopping only to pick up a correspondent friend from *Prensa Latina,* the Cuban News Service. He demanded and received an audience with Ambassador Philip Bonsal with whom he lodged a vigorous protest. The harassed diplomat no doubt realized the potentially explosive propaganda material that could fall into Castro's hands. He agreed to submit Williams's written protest to Washington, and within a few hours Mrs. Williams and her children had a guard of several police cars.

WILLIAMS BELIEVES that the white supremacist system of the South could not survive very long without the support, or the tacit consent, of various agencies of the federal government. At the same time, he is convinced that the federal government offers the only real hope the Negro has of winning any large measure of his civil rights. But Washington will act only under strong pressure, and this the Negro people must create by a more militant assertion of their rights—including "meeting violence with violence." The white South, through its traditional alliance with conservative Republicans, subjects the federal government to an enormous amount of pressure and wins appreciable results. Consequently, it has been able to defy the Supreme Court's school desegregation order for seven years with little federal intervention. Williams concedes that the Negro cannot match the South's great resources in either money or Congressional influence, despite the best

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intentions of Northern liberals and even a liberal President. But the Negro does have a formidable weapon in his sensitive position in international affairs. Without the cold war and the competition between the colossi of West and East, it seems doubtful that the many African nations could have gained independence so rapidly. Certainly the history of U.S. intervention in Latin America indicates that the Cuban revolution would not have been permitted to swing so far to the left if not for the extreme degree of United States sensitivity to world opinion today. For the same reason (though he knows it is possible to exaggerate the similarities), Williams believes the American Negro has been presented with the finest opportunity history is likely to offer him to obtain full participation in our national life.

Thus, when President Eisenhower was in India championing the rights of Asians to better housing, Williams wired him in care of Prime Minister Nehru (also an NAACP member) to protest a housing redevelopment scheme, largely financed by federal funds, that Union County officials had designed to destroy the best Negro neighborhood in Monroe. Eisenhower acted with unusual haste, and the project has been stalled ever since.

Nowhere was Williams's method of subjecting every racial incident to world exposure more effectively demonstrated than in the "Kissing Case." On October 28, 1958, two Monroe colored boys, James Hanover Thompson and David "Fuzzy" Sampson, eight and nine years old, were arrested and charged with assault on a white female. Earlier that afternoon, in a game with some white children, James had either kissed or been kissed by a seven-year-old white girl. The boys were held incommunicado three days before Williams knew they were under arrest. Ironically, according to Williams, his first intelligence came from the mayor of Monroe who telephoned because he said he knew Williams was a "troublemaker" and he wanted to know if Williams had any ideas about how to handle the case. (The mayor denies he made the call.) It seemed to Williams that the boys required immediate legal aid which was not available in Union County. He submitted a request to the national office of the NAACP; but meanwhile, on the sixth day after their arrest, in a closed hearing, without defense counsel, Judge J. Hamilton Price heard the case and committed the boys to indeterminate terms in reform school.

Williams, through an intermediary, was responsible for Ted Poston's breaking the story in the New York *Post,* and from there, it spread around the world with lightning-like rapidity. Demonstrations were staged against American embassies in Europe, outstanding intellectuals protested to the State Department, and Canon L. John Collins of London's St. Paul's Cathedral became involved in a lively transatlantic feud with Luther H. Hodges, then governor of North Carolina. (The governor, to his embarrassment, was first informed of the "Kissing Case" by a reporter while in the middle of a television interview in Philadelphia.) Eventually the boys were released from the reform school and allowed to go back to live with their mothers who had been forced to move out of Union County. "Without the pressure of world opinion," Williams insists, "those boys would still be in custody."

THESE STORIES, which I later verified, were related to me during long nightly conversations in Havana. One evening I asked Williams a question I thought he might not answer. What truth was there in the rumor that had been circulated during the NAACP convention that his men were not only armed (in the South, after all, a surprisingly large number of people keep guns) but that they were in fact a small army, drilled and disciplined, with access to an arsenal?

He laughed. "Hell, man, that's no secret, and I don't know why it should frighten the board of directors of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NAACP. Everybody in Monroe knows what we have, that we know how to use it, and that we are willing to use it. The Mayor and the Chief of Police know, and so does the Klan. Come to Monroe when you get back to the States and see for yourself." This was the same kind of invitation that had taken me to Cuba and two months later I was in Monroe, North Carolina.

Some Southern towns are lovely, with great old houses that slumber on broad streets beneath spreading, ancient trees. In such towns even a Negro writer on a hurried visit can perceive that, although *his* ancestors only supplied the labor under the ante-bellum system of caste and privilege, at least there was a comprehensive society in which everyone had a place; and, dimly, he can understand why the Southern aristocracy fought so desperately to retain the cruel and dehumanizing system that was slavery. Here, at least, social relations had a symmetry wherein the dark, ugly things were hidden away, in the slave quarter or on the backstairs of the big house.

But Monroe is not such a town. It is ugly. There is little distinction in the architecture of its finest houses; and although it is built on hills, there is a dreary flatness about it. Worse, it is a composite town. Unpainted one-room Negro shacks, which rent for an inflated ten dollars a month, sit within a stone's throw of the tiny, neat, unimaginative bungalows of the white middle class. One can drive three blocks in any direction and see the graphic reality of race relations in Union County. The Northern visitor, keenly aware that violence always simmers beneath the seeming tranquility, wonders that anybody, black or white, would want to fight over this place.

In the days of the steam engine Monroe was a prosperous railroad maintenance town. A generation ago Robert Williams's father, along with a significant number of Monroe's colored men, serviced the trains and earned a steady living at it. They bought their own homes in the colored section called Newtown, sent their children to the colored school most of the year, and saw in their youngsters the hope of a better future. If they were not a genuine middle class, they were better off than the tenant farmers and sharecroppers in the county's rural population. But the Diesel engine supplanted steam, and the depression and mechanization displaced most of the tenant farmers and sharecroppers; and, though Monroe did not die, it was left severely crippled.

By the time Williams had grown to adolescence, unemployment was a chronic problem in Newtown. He served a hitch in the army, somehow squeezed in three years of college at West Virginia State and Johnson C. Smith College in nearby Charlotte, and then enlisted in the Marine Corps for a tour of duty. On returning to Monroe, he entered the lists of the letters-to-the-editor columns of the Charlotte newspapers and seems to have spent most of his time incensing the local whites by debunking their notions of white supremacy. During this period he married Miss Mable Robinson, a sturdy, tall, attractive woman with whom he has had two children. He worked at his trade of machinist while he wrote his provocative letters to the newspapers. It is possible that no one outside of North Carolina would ever have heard of Williams if the Supreme Court had not ordered school desegregation in 1954.

IT IS STILL difficult to imagine the impact of the Court's decision on small Southern towns. Intercourse between the races—that is, social intercourse during the Southern day which, as James Baldwin has pointed out, is quite different from the guilt-ridden, integrated Southern night—was the function of the local white officials and businessmen, and colored ministers and other self-appointed spokesmen who purported to represent the views of their fellow Negroes. White lawyers in Monroe often defended Negroes who were in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trouble (not too vigorously, to be sure) and were paid by the NAACP chapter. There was an understanding, a working relationship, between the whites who ran the town and the colored ministers. The whites would try to control their extremists, and in return, the black men of God helped to keep the black population in its place.

But suddenly, one Monday in 1954, a long held tradition was struck a deathblow. The NAACP, which had never claimed to be anything but a moderate organization, became the ogre of the Southland. Acknowledged membership in it could mean the loss of job, credit, and physical security. Negro doctors, lawyers, undertakers—whoever had to be licensed by the state—promptly withdrew from membership. When the Union County chapter was apparently in its last throes (with only six members), Robert Williams was drafted for the presidency. ("You're the only fool left," said one of those who urged him to accept the position.) Somewhat innocently, Williams set about trying to recruit members among the respectable middle class, and, needless to say, he failed absolutely. In desperation he turned to the lower class of the Negro community. He likes to tell of the day he walked into a pool parlor and asked if anyone there wanted to join the NAACP. The players looked at him in astonishment: "Man, do you mean *we* can belong to that organization?" From that time on, Williams has had as many members as he could manage, sometimes more. He says of that period, "I made an important discovery. The woman earning ten, fifteen dollars a week as a domestic, the sharecropper, the ditchdigger—they were more loyal to the NAACP than the Negroes who were much better off. They would stick under pressure, probably because they had less to lose and we were the only fighting organization they had."

As the Union County branch of the NAACP grew, so did the Ku Klux Klan, which had renewed its activity soon after the Supreme Court decision. Most of the Klan's wrath was directed against Dr. A. E. Perry, one of the six who had remained in the chapter when Williams assumed leadership. The popular young physician, who was fairly prosperous, had built an attractive, ranch-style home overlooking a new highway. The Klan considered the house an affront, and it believed that Perry contributed large sums of money to the NAACP chapter. It publicly announced its intention of running him out of the county.

"When we heard over the radio," Williams says, "that a Klan meeting had drawn 8,000 people, we figured it was time to take a stand. You see, there are only 13,000 people in the county." (Klansmen from surrounding counties were swelling the attendance.) The colored men of Monroe armed themselves with the heaviest weapons available, and set up an alarm system that would summon them instantly to the scene of any trouble. A regular night guard was established around Dr. Perry's home. Trenches were dug, Molotov cocktails prepared, and gas masks and helmets were distributed. At one point during this troubled period the police attempted to seize the weapons, but desisted when Williams and Perry threatened a law suit. (Nothing in the laws of North Carolina and of most Southern states restricts or contravenes the constitutional right "to keep and bear arms, and be secure in one's person.")

A Klan motorcade, sixty cars strong, invaded Newtown on the evening of October 5, 1957. As was their custom, the robed Klansmen fired at the homes of the Negroes as they drove past. Near Dr. Perry's home they were confronted with the sustained fire of several scores of men who had been instructed by Williams not to injure anyone if it could be helped. At the first sign of resistance the Klan motorcade dissolved into chaos. Panicky Klansmen fled in every direction, some of them wrecking their automobiles. There have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been no Klan motorcades in Monroe since.*

It is interesting to speculate on why this significant event received so little publicity. Monroe Chief of Police Mauney admitted to the Associated Press the next day that there had been a motorcade—he knew because it had included several police cars—but he denied that there had been an exchange of gunfire. Williams invited the press to Newtown to view the bullet-scarred houses and the wrecked automobiles whose owners did not care to come to claim them. Nevertheless, few people outside the state knew that the clash had taken place, and that the Klan had sustained a decisive defeat. Compare this with the nationwide news coverage and wide applause given the Indians in nearby Lumberton County, when they routed a Klan meeting with gunfire a few weeks later. About this Williams says, "It's as if they were afraid to let other Negroes know what we have done here. We have proved that a hooded man who thinks a white life is superior to a black life is not so ready to risk his white life when a black man stands up to him." He recalls proudly that in Monroe they have had their sit-ins and wade-ins, but none of their boys and girls has been the victim of violence from racist hoodlums. "They know, don't you see, that we are not passive resisters."

The morale of the Negroes in Union County is high. They carry themselves with a dignity I have seen in no other Southern community. Largely vanished are the slouching posture, the scratching of head, and the indirect, mumbled speech that used to characterize the Negro male in the presence of whites. It is as if, in facing up to their enemies, they have finally confronted a terrible reality and found it not so terrible after all.

But they have had to pay a price for their new self-respect. Paternalism has been destroyed in Union County. The left-over food that the colored maid could once carry home is now consigned instead to the garbage pail, and the old clothes that found their way to the colored section are now either sold or burned. The intimate communication that used to pass from mistress to maid, master to workman (seldom in the reverse direction) has largely disappeared. Negroes suspected of belonging to the NAACP are told "Let Williams feed you!" and "Let Williams find you a place to live!" as they are fired from their jobs and evicted from their homes. Northern owners of the new factories, by agreement with the city fathers, hire no Negroes but import white workers from Charlotte, twenty-five miles away. It would almost appear that the rulers of Monroe society had determined to strengthen the Union County NAACP and Williams's influence on the colored community; and, in fact, that is what they have done.

BUT WHAT ROLE is Williams likely to play in the future? Although he has shown great personal courage and demonstrated effective leadership ability in Monroe, he can claim no large following outside his own county. True, he has a scattering of fervent supporters in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, who subscribe to *The Crusader,* the weekly newsletter in which he flays not only white supremacists but Negro moderates who accommodate themselves to the system. But he is in danger of being driven out of Monroe where his standard of living is close to penury. (No one will employ him in any capacity in Union or nearby counties.) Certainly the present national leadership of the NAACP does not fear that Williams will undermine their position in the near future. The organization is still the

* Dr. Perry has been driven out of Union County. The county's leading Catholic layman, he was arrested in 1958 and indicted on charges of performing an abortion on a white woman. Sole evidence submitted against him was her uncorroborated statement. He was convicted, sent to prison, and barred from Union County. Denied the right to practice medicine, he now works as an assistant to an undertaker in Durham.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most effective civil rights force in the country, and few of its members have shown any inclination to abandon it.

BUT SOONER than anyone now supposes, three factors may create a social climate in the South in which a Robert Williams will play a leading role. They are the growing militancy of Negro students; the intransigence of the Southern white oligarchy; and the depressed Negro working class and peasantry. The students and the white ruling groups of the South are locked in a struggle that has greater ramifications than perhaps even they realize. At stake is not whether a black child shall sit beside a white child in a schoolroom or at a lunch counter; it is not even whether a black *boy* sits beside a white *girl* and one day marries her. At stake is the very existence of the Southern oligarchy, its entrenched power and traditional privileges which rest on a non-democratic political system and an economy based on a plentiful supply of cheap, unorganized labor. Ultimately the struggle in the South will determine who will represent the states and the Congressional districts in Washington, who will sit in the legislatures, the city halls, and the courts, who will operate the industries and the arable land. As the real issue becomes more apparent, two developments seem certain. First, those who now wield power will refuse to yield beyond a minimum of token desegregation and will retaliate, often violently and in defiance of federal law; and second, the students will abandon the technique of passive resistance as it proves ineffectual in seriously disturbing the power structure of Southern society.

The most decisive factor in the conflict will probably be the Negro laboring class, heretofore unheard from. These are the great masses of the unskilled, who belong to no labor unions or civic organizations, whose churches are more concerned with leading their flocks to heaven than to a fuller share of democracy on earth, whose only fraternity is that of the millions of neglected and untrained who have nothing to barter in the labor market but their willingness to work. Only yesterday the man of this class could pick the cotton, run the elevator, pack the crate, but now the machine can do it better and displaces him. Government statistics hardly suggest how great his number is, much less what he is feeling and thinking, but we know he is everywhere. (The industrialization programs of the South almost always exclude him. Fourteen per cent of the black labor force is now unemployed as opposed to 7 per cent for the nation as a whole.) A casual walk through any colored section of a Southern town or city will reveal him, standing on the corner, lounging near the bar, slouched on the doorstep, staring into the uncertainty that is his future. The "they" in his life, those who make decisions that vitally affect him, are not only the governments, federal, state, and local, the captains of industry and finance, but even the Negro middle class and the striking students, all of whom seem to be going someplace without him. It is not *his* children that all of the school desegregation furor is about; he is lucky if he can keep them in the colored school. No one can presently claim to speak for this man, not church, union, nor NAACP; and just as he does not yet clearly understand the social forces arrayed against him, neither do *they* understand *him* or the various stimuli to which he is likely to respond.

Predictions are risky at best, but it seems safe to say that as these forces come into sharper conflict in what is essentially an attempt to overthrow an entrenched political and economic power, the Negro leadership class will be faced with a crisis, for its purely legalistic (or passive resistance) approach will clearly not be able to control the dynamics of the Negro struggle. Then to the fore may come Robert Williams, and other young men and women like him, who have concluded that the only way to win a revolution is to be a revolutionary.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A SYMPOSIUM

JEWISHNESS & THE YOUNGER INTELLECTUALS

Introduction: In February 1944—some two years after America's entry into World War II and less than two years before the end of the war—COMMENTARY's forerunner, the *Contemporary Jewish Record,* published a symposium entitled "Under Forty: American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews." The theme of the symposium was apparently a literary one, for the editors in their introductory statement announced that their intention was to cast light on the question of whether there was any important difference between the work produced by American writers of Jewish descent (who had only recently become "full participants in the cultural life of the country") and that of their "Christian colleagues." It seems clear, however, that this approach was something of a stratagem employed by the editors to get at another and more elusive question—a question at which they merely hinted in asking "to what extent, and in what manner, has [the Jewish writer's] awareness of his position as artist and citizen been modified or changed by the revival of anti-Semitism as a powerful force in the political history of our time?" What lay behind this question, I feel sure, was the editors' awareness that most of the writers they had invited to contribute were assimilationists and that their assimilationism was grounded in the belief that the "Jewish problem"—as it used to be called—was on its way to being solved in the modern world. The Dreyfus Case had persuaded Theodor Herzl that assimilationism would never work; surely the Nazis ought to have taught American Jews the same lesson. And if a Jew becomes convinced that there is no escaping the disabilities of Jewish birth, isn't he then required to abandon assimilationism as a program, even for himself, and search for some other solution?

The eleven contributors to the symposium included some of the most gifted and brilliant members of the younger generation of writers and critics in America—Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, Delmore Schwartz, Isaac Rosenfeld, Louis Kronenberger, Clement Greenberg—and it is therefore no surprise that they should have understood the true nature of the apparently academic questions they were being asked to consider. Yes, they all said—and here I am going beyond the explicit comments some of them made and into the implications of their remarks—we now know that integration into the surrounding culture is not the answer to anti-Semitism. But where the good 19th-century emancipated Jew could find an alternative answer in the principle of national sovereignty—not only because he thought it would work but also because he *believed,* along with so many of his contemporaries, in nationalism as a creative and benevolent force—we have learned (thanks partly to the Nazis) to be repelled by nationalism in any form whatever. The Zionists we have met are generally "dreary middle-class chauvinists"—the phrase is Alfred Kazin's—and we have no wish to associate ourselves with them or what they stand for. What, then, is left? You speak of the "Jewish heritage" and ask whether we have been shaped by it. Certainly we have been shaped by the fact of our Jewish birth, but we are by no means sure that you are not con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fusing the experience of being the child of immigrants with the experience of being a Jew. And what is this Jewish heritage? Whatever it may have been in the past, today in America it has deteriorated into nothingness, or worse than nothingness. It has been integrated into a culture which is itself inferior and vicious, and it has taken on all the worst qualities of that culture while retaining nothing valuable of its own.

Out of modern Jewish religion, said Lionel Trilling, "there has not come a single voice with the note of authority—of philosophical, or poetic, or even of rhetorical, let alone of religious, authority," and "as the Jewish community now exists, it can give no sustenance to the American artist or intellectual who is born a Jew." Said Clement Greenberg: "Jewish life in America has become, *for reasons of security,* so solidly, so rigidly, restrictedly, and suffocatingly middle-class that behavior within it is a pattern from which personality can deviate in only a mechanical and hardly ever in a temperamental sense. No people on earth are more correct, more staid, more provincial, more commonplace, more inexperienced; none observe more strictly the letter of every code that is respectable; no people do so completely and habitually what is expected of them. . . ." Who is the American Jew? asked Alfred Kazin. "What is Jewish in him? What does he believe, especially in these terrible years, that separates him at all from our national habits of acquisitiveness, showiness, and ignorant brag? . . . What a pity that he should feel 'different,' when he believes so little; what a stupendous moral pity, historically, that the Fascist cutthroats should have their eyes on him, too, when he asks for so little—only to be safe, in all the Babbitt warrens."

These were severe and merciless indictments (though one could find their equal in Zionist literature and worse in the Hebrew prophets), and certainly they were motivated in part by the bitterness these young American Jews felt over the fact that the Jewish community should have been no better than the middle-class America from which so huge a proportion of its most gifted artists and intellectuals had always felt estranged.

Indeed, the few positive statements made by the contributors—for example Delmore Schwartz's: "And thus I have to say (with gratitude and yet diffidence because it has been so different for other Jews, different to the point of death) that the fact of Jewishness has been nothing but an ever-growing good to me, and it seems clear to me now that it can be, at least for me, nothing but a fruitful and inexhaustible inheritance"— had less to do with Judaism or the Jewish community than with the advantages to a modern writer of having been born into a marginal culture. The Jewish writer in America was doubly schooled in the experience of alienation and so, paradoxically, could speak as the quintessential modern man.

The word alienation supplies the real key to understanding the 1944 symposium. Not all the contributors were socialists—of the ones I have selected for analysis, only Clement Greenberg actually said that the Jewish problem was a version of "the alienation of man under capitalism" and could only be solved in a socialist society—but it has not in our time been necessary to embrace socialism in order to repudiate the life and culture of the middle class throughout the Western world. Thus it was the middle-classness of the Jewish community which more than anything else accounted for the harsh words the young writers of 1944 had for their fellow Jews in America. Below the harsh words, however, lay an assumption obviously shared by most of the contributors—that, by committing themselves to the Ideal in culture and politics, they were being more truly Jewish than the community which called itself Jewish.

That they were unfair and one-sided in their judgments a large number of these writers themselves later came to acknowledge. One has only to skim through the back files of COMMENTARY to see how far many of the contributors to the 1944 symposium (and others like them) went in revising their estimate of the "Jewish heritage." Though in 1944 they would probably have all agreed with Trilling's flat assertion that modern Jewish religion had produced nothing of value, ten years later at least half of them had become enthusiasts of Martin Buber, while the whole of the New York literary world was ringing with praise of the Yiddish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

storytellers, the Hasidim, Maimonides, medieval Hebrew poetry, and even the Rabbis of the Talmud. (Trilling himself wrote an essay called "Wordsworth and the Rabbis.") The relation of the Jewish writer to his Jewishness had shifted dramatically, and by 1955, after the work of Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud—to mention only two names—had begun to appear, Kazin could not have said, as he did in 1944, that "When I read a novel by an American Jew that is at least as grounded in the life it rejects as Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* or Dreiser's *Sister Carrie,* I shall believe in the empirical fact of our participation." The work of these writers was not only grounded in American Jewish life, but in many instances it even struck an affirmative stance, celebrating—as did Kazin's own autobiographical book about Brownsville, *A Walker in the City*—the richness and color of the immigrant urban experience.

What had happened? To some extent, no doubt, the new relation to Jewishness and Judaism that was expressed by the literary intelligentsia of the 50's developed merely as a consequence of the passage of years: what a man flees in youth he often learns to love in middle age. But the main factor operating here, I believe, was the widespread retreat among intellectuals from the whole complex of attitudes symbolized by the term alienation. The new relation to Jewishness, in other words, was an aspect of the new and more positive relation to America which was bred in large part by the menace of Soviet totalitarianism on the one side and the change (or apparent change) that had taken place in the character of the American middle class.* A symposium published in 1952 in *Partisan Review,* "America and the Intellectuals," provides extensive evidence of this new relation, which might be described psychologically as a great willingness by the intellectuals to acknowledge and *value* the American in themselves—a willingness that extended quite naturally, in the case of those who were also Jews, to the Jew in them. It ought to be said, however, that the new attitude toward the American middle class in general—which was seen as having overcome its Babbittry and which was now thought of as the great bulwark against totalitarianism—was never quite extended to the American Jewish community. If most of the contributors to the 1944 symposium later came to discover great fascination and virtue in traditional Jewish culture, very few of them ever acknowledged the unfairness of the charge that Jewish life in America bore no trace of the admirable characteristics of the Jewish past. For whatever else may be said of the American Jewish community, it does—in the fantastically elaborate network of social, welfare, and educational institutions it supports (a network that no other group even begins to parallel), in the rescue work it has done, and in the generosity it has consistently shown toward the oppressed and the homeless whenever called upon to do so—maintain in a very active and vivid way the traditions of communal responsibility and social service which in past contexts have been singled out as among the most attractive qualities of "the Jewish heritage." And one could easily expand the list of traditional Jewish qualities that persist in one form or another among the Jews of America.

WHILE ALL THIS was taking place in the generation that is now between forty-five and fifty-five years old, a new generation of American Jews was beginning to make its appearance on the scene—a generation which on the whole was at least one remove from the immigrant experience and which emerged into consciousness in an atmosphere that contrasted very sharply with that of the 30's. Radicalism and rebellion were probably less fashionable among the young than ever before in modern history; a much publicized religious revival was in process; the State of Israel was in existence and fighting for its life; and the Jews in America had arrived. Discrimination had declined sharply; anti-Semitism was in great disrepute (after having been fashionable for so long even among the educated); and the somewhat premature claim made in 1944 by the editors of the *Contemporary Jewish Record,* that Jews had become "full participants in the cultural life of the country," was now finally

* I have discussed these developments at greater length in several articles: "Jewish Culture and the Intellectuals," COMMENTARY May 1955; "The Young Generation," the *New Leader,* March 11, 1957; and "The Intellectuals and Jewish Fate," *Midstream,* Winter 1957.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and wholly true. Jews were active and prominent in every sphere of activity in America, including the arts; what Benjamin DeMott recently observed in these pages concerning Jewish writers—that they now have a "place in the establishment"—could be said with equal justice of Jewish musicians, painters, doctors, lawyers, politicians.

The editors of COMMENTARY were curious to know how the generation of Jewish intellectuals who came to maturity in such an atmosphere and under such conditions felt about its relation to the Jewish heritage and to the community which is committed to preserving and extending that heritage. Since Jewish intellectuals are now prominent in all fields, we did not limit our inquiries to literary people, but rather tried to extend the occupational range of our sample as far as possible—with the intention, however, of finding young men and women who, in some sense which is rather difficult to define with precision, correspond in type and distinction (or promise of future distinction) with the 1944 group. Assuming—perhaps foolishly—that a Jew with a definite religious commitment of any kind would regard the sort of questions we wished to ask either as irrelevant to him or as self-evidently answerable, we did not invite any representatives of the younger religious intelligentsia (though when one of the people we did invite turned out to our surprise to be a member of that group, we decided to publish his reply anyway). We also decided to invite only native-born Americans, but here again one respondent (and possibly more) turned out not to fit the specifications; his contribution nevertheless appears below. The age limit we set was forty, though I believe that most of the contributors are much younger than that and only three of four are over thirty-five. In any case, the intention was to question young people who seemed to us —from what we knew of their work—to have been formed or shaped by the characteristic conditions of the postwar period rather than by some earlier ethos. We sent out about fifty questionnaires, expecting ten or fifteen replies; instead we received a total of thirty-one, and they are all printed below, in alphabetical order.

This is, of course, by no means a "scientific" sampling; perhaps it is not even representative. The symposium does, however, bring together a random group of the most talented and most articulate younger intellectuals of Jewish birth in America today. Their backgrounds—geographical, social, and religious—are remarkably diverse; they come from all classes, and their parrents range from rabbis to militant atheists. Their occupations, too, are highly varied. Almost all the academic disciplines are represented (including science); there are novelists, poets, critics, publishers, and editors; there is a film producer, a newspaperman, a Congressional assistant, a psychiatrist. Many of the contributors are married (in some cases to non-Jews) and have children, which means that they have been forced to confront such problems as whether they wish to give their children a Jewish education: the problem of Jewishness for them has therefore become "existential" and urgent where it once may have been theoretical.

HOW, THEN, DO these third- and fourth-generation American Jewish intellectuals—these children of the "neo-conservative" age, the age of the religious revival and the rediscovery of America—differ in their relation to Jewishness from their elders, the children of the immigrants and the depression and the militantly anti-religious atmosphere of the various radical movements of the 30's? The answer is—hardly at all. To be sure, there is far less bitterness in the pieces below than one might find in the 1944 symposium; on the whole, the contributors to the present symposium are neither vigorously rejecting Jewishness nor enthusiastically rushing toward it. Most of them have something good to say for the Jewish heritage, though very few express any sense of living commitment to it—and like their forebears of 1944, they assume easily, and incorrectly I think, that the American Jewish community is indistinguishable from the middle-class American community in general and bears no sign of the former attributes of the Jewish people. Again, like the 1944 group, they are against "chauvinism" (though the overwhelming majority express a great sympathy for Israel) and "parochialism," feeling that they properly belong to a much wider world than is encompassed by the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jewish community—or, indeed, by America itself. Except in some of the older contributors (who in this respect are closer in tone to the preceding generation), there is scarcely a trace of the idea that a man must have strong local or "parochial" attachments before he can achieve a true universalism of spirit.

But what is most surprising and, to my mind at least, most reassuring is the atmosphere of idealism that permeates this symposium, an idealism that many of the contributors themselves associate with the fact of their Jewishness. Believing (on the basis, it should be emphasized, of an obviously scant acquaintance with the literature and history of Judaism) that the essence of Judaism is the struggle for universal justice and human brotherhood, these young intellectuals assert over and over again that anyone who fights for the Ideal is to that degree more Jewish than a man who merely observes the rituals or merely identifies himself with the Jewish community. This, really, is what the 1944 group was also saying, that the essential tradition of Judaism came to be embodied in modern times not in the committed Jewish community but in the great post-Emancipation figures who rushed out of the ghetto to devour and then re-create the culture of the West: Marx, Freud, Einstein.

How do they feel about the future? By and large, they are perfectly well aware that their kind of Jewishness provides little hope for the survival of even those Jewish traditions which they admire; as some of them actually point out, they are living off the religious and cultural capital of the past. They seem to think, however, that the best Jewish traditions are no longer the unique possession of the Jewish people—obviously one can be an idealist without being a Jew. And many of them would agree with Jason Epstein, who says that *all* "the conventional groupings," national, religious, and ethnic, "are on the way out," that the world is in a state of revolutionary change, and that its contours are bound to re-form themselves during the next fifty or a hundred years. To paraphrase Elihu Katz's striking remark about Israel: the trouble with the Jews is that they are such a big idea in the perspective of world history and such a little idea in the perspective of modern history.

But are the Jews such a "little idea" in the perspective of modern history? In some sense, of course, they are; so, for that matter, are Protestants and Frenchmen. Yet the demise of the Jewish people has been predicted with equal confidence so many times in the past two thousand years that one simply hesitates to be persuaded by still another plausible case for its inevitable disappearance. I do not believe—if I may conclude by joining the symposium myself—that the Jews are destined to disappear, though I would be extremely hard put to argue the matter convincingly. Nor do I believe that a Jew does himself, or the world, any great service by an indifference to the future of the Jewish people. Let me make it as clear as I possibly can that in my view any man has an absolute moral right to choose his loyalties, even if this means violating the law of the land and incurring the disfavor of his fellows. At the same time it would be disingenuous to ignore the fact that certain choices bring with them unpleasant human consequences, and especially those choices which involve the wilful tampering with things that are somehow too big and too mysterious to be controlled by individual reason. I know of course that this argument has been used by kings to justify divine right, by the rich to justify the existence of the poor, and in general by those who have tried to stem the tide of social change. Nevertheless, there *are*—there must be—in the life of every individual areas that are sacred, and demands before which the only proper attitude is piety or reverence. After four thousand years of existence, the Jews are indeed a very big idea in the history of the world, and no person born into this idea can dismiss it or refuse to acknowledge the loyalties and responsibilities it imposes on him, without doing himself some violence. I will not pretend that anything very concrete in the way of program or philosophy follows from such piety. But I will register my conviction that one ought to feel a sense of "historic reverence" to Jewish tradition even, or perhaps especially, if one is convinced that the curtain is about to drop on the last act of a very long play.

—Norman Podhoretz

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE QUESTIONS

1. Do you feel that the situation of the Jew in America has altered in the past fifteen years? If so, has this had any influence on your present attitude toward your own Jewishness?

2. What are your feelings, if any, about the generation of Jewish intellectuals whose socialism provided the basis for their more or less antagonistic relation to the Jewish community in America and elsewhere? Do you believe there are viable elements in the tradition they represented?

3. Do you think that your experience as a Jew is importantly relevant to your experience as an American? Do you feel that Jewish culture—in the broadest sense of the term—exerts a significant influence upon American life? If so, how would you define this influence?

4. Considering that you are at least partly a product of Jewish tradition, do you feel any obligation—any sense of historical reverence—to that tradition? Does this obligation include an involvement in the Jewish community, or extend to transmitting the values inherent in Jewish tradition to your children? Or do you perhaps see no merit in the claim that the Jewish people have created or preserved certain special values?

5. Have you ever considered the possibility that your children may convert to another religion? If so, how do you feel about this possibility?

6. Do you feel any special connection with the State of Israel? Does it, in your opinion, exert a legitimate claim on your sympathies? Would you say that it embodies the values of Jewish tradition more clearly than the American Jewish community does?

Raziel Abelson: I shall follow the Jewish tradition of responding to a question by asking another question: What is a Jew? Is being a Jew an essence, like being animate or rational or mortal, or is it an accidental trait, like being a New Yorker, being liberal, or being susceptible to colds? I think it *used* to be an essence. One could change one's residence and ideology and even do something about one's colds, but one could not choose to cease being a Jew. Assimilation and even conversion did not prevent the world from identifying Disraeli, Heine, Marx, or Bergson as Jews. Excommunication did not expunge his Jewishness from Spinoza. But nowadays, conversions both to and from Judaism are easier and more accepted by society as real. It would seem that Jewishness, which was once an essential trait of a person, is becoming more superficial and accidental, thus confirming the Hegelian insight that ontology is a historical science.

Two groups of people still insist on regarding Jewishness as a fundamental, pervasive, and ineradicable trait: chauvinistic Jews and anti-Semites. Sartre described the anti-Semite as a man who insists on regarding both himself and his enemy—the Jew—as inert objects that cannot help being what they are. I think Sartre's description also applies (with suitable changes) to the chauvinistic Jew who insists that there is something uniquely and unalterably superior about being Jewish, like the woman in a Philip Roth story who, on reading a newspaper account of an airplane crash, grieves only for the Jewish victims. I think these two attitudes are sides of the same coin. The anti-Semite feels that there is something

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ineradicably evil in every Jew: he cannot explain what it is, but that does not shake his conviction that it is eternally there. The chauvinistic Jew is equally convinced that there is something unalterably good about a Jew, although he cannot say in what this desirable essence consists. It cannot be for him a matter of religious belief, since surely even the Orthodox Jew mourns the death of the Jewish victims of Hitler who happened to be atheists. It cannot be biological continuity, since Jewish genealogy is notoriously obscure and since converts to Judaism have always been fully accepted as Jews. Nor can it be cultural identity, since the American Jew and Christian have far more in common culturally than, say, the American Jew and the Yemenite Jew. I am led to conjecture that it was the very persecution of the Jews that made Jewishness seem an inescapable essence, both for the Jew and for the anti-Jew. In attempting to stamp out Jewish identity, anti-Semitism succeeded in stamping it in. It is therefore not surprising that the decline of anti-Semitism in the Western world since the defeat of Hitler has been accompanied by a lessening of Jewish self-consciousness and an increase in adoptions and abandonments of Jewishness.

IN ANSWER, THEN, to my own question, I do not believe that there is an essence of Jewishness, a property that all Jews and only Jews possess in common. Yet I do feel a bond relating me to all other Jews, past, present, and future, and this bond cannot be simply the common experience of persecution since I have never suffered in that way except vicariously. Perhaps, to borrow a Wittgensteinian metaphor from another context, this bond is like a rope made of overlapping strands, no one of which extends from beginning to end. If so, then I can only identify the particular strands that link me directly to some of my Jewish contemporaries and ancestors, without denying that I am just as strongly, if less directly, bound to my fellow Jews throughout space and time, yet without affirming that there is a Jewish essence. In tracing these strands, I shall try to answer COMMENTARY'S questions.

What I have said so far is already an answer to COMMENTARY'S first question, and partly an answer to Question 4. The question mentions "values inherent in Jewish tradition," but I am unable to identify any values that have been preserved and cherished continuously through the long and winding course of Jewish history. The tribal pride and the love of life of the people of the Biblical kingdom seem to me to have very little in common with the devotion to ritual and reverence for Talmudic law by which the Jews of the Diaspora nourished their identity as a chosen people. Their belief in their unique destiny was, I think, a grand illusion that made a supernatural virtue out of their earthly misery, an illusion poignantly recognized in the story of the Jew who, on reaching heaven, proposes to God that, if the Jews are really His chosen people, would He mind choosing someone else for a while? However, the skeptical rationality and cosmopolitanism of the modern assimilated Jew seems as remote from the otherworldly ritualism of the ghetto Jew as both are from the tribalism and nature worship of the Biblical Israelite. The Enlightenment and subsequent spread of democratic institutions and religious tolerance drew the Jews slowly out of the ghetto and thus out of their eschatological fantasy. The assimilated Jew, discarding his own traditions and not deeply rooted in those of his adopted society, was particularly well suited to become a spokesman for rational social change. It is this aspect of Jewish history, whose heroic figures are Spinoza, Marx, Freud, and Einstein, to which I feel most directly linked. Consequently, the Orthodox Jew, steeped in the medieval traditions of the ghetto, the Reform Jew who, unconcerned about the contradiction involved, tries to bring ancient traditions "up to date," and the dedicated Zionist who sees the fulfillment of the Biblical covenant in the advancement of the State of Israel, all seem to me to ignore the role that the modern Jew is best qualified to perform—namely, that of spokesman for a rationally organized, democratic world society, unfettered by parochial traditions and superstitions.

My answer to Question 2 must already be obvious: The liberal and socialist Jewish intellectuals of previous generations are my cultural ancestors whose birthright I hope to preserve for later generations.

As to Question 5, I have tried to make it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clear that I do not regard Jewishness as primarily a matter of religious belief. The most profound and valuable insight of Judaic religion was, I believe, the ideal of universal justice, and this has become so permanent a part of Western civilization that it is no longer distinctively either a Jewish or a religious ideal. The special forms of religious worship to which many Jews still cling have only a sentimental meaning to me. But I would indeed be shocked if my child were some day to embrace another religion, for the simple reason that I expect him to have enough Jewish skepticism not to be fetishistic about *any* of the ceremonial forms that distinguish one religion from another. But I would like him to retain a sense of the sacred and sublime, enough to appreciate religious symbols without being habituated to any of them.

Question 6, as to my feelings about Israel and its claims on American Jews, is the most difficult to answer clearly and candidly. I have conflicting feelings about Israel as, I should imagine, most American Jews must have, considering how many incompatible values the Israeli state represents. It claims to be the fulfillment of the covenant, yet it is constantly defending its secular freedom against an Orthodox minority that takes the covenant seriously enough to want Israel to be a theocracy. Its political and cultural leadership was recruited mainly from the socialist intellectuals of European Jewry, yet its survival as a state depends on the very nationalistic and militaristic fervor that socialists have always regarded as the main obstacle to a world society.

Yet despite these ideological anomalies, I do feel that all Jews have an obligation to support the State of Israel, politically and financially, because there is no alternative but the unthinkable one of Israel's extermination by its enemies. But it should also be recognized that, with the rise of Israel, the Jewish people have, to some extent, abandoned their historic role of a people who through their patient suffering preserved and nourished the ideal of a world order based on universal justice. It would seem that the American Negroes have now assumed this role, and that God has, after all, "chosen someone else for a while." The Jew can hardly regret the lost mantle of martyrdom, but he should realize that, in discarding it, he cannot appeal as effectively to the troubled conscience of the world. Thus Israel has ceded its right to expect sympathetic understanding of nationalistic policies such as the invasion of Suez, the rigid position on the Arab refugees, the kidnapping of Eichmann, and (if the rumors are true) the development of atomic weapons. The support of Israel by American Jews should therefore not be sentimental and uncritical support, but should be given only in a way that exerts a more liberal, internationalist, and humanitarian influence on Israeli politics. I believe Israel can effectively represent the historic mission of the Jewish people only when it sacrifices its national interests for the sake of world peace and social justice.

[RAZIEL ABELSON is an assistant professor of philosophy at New York University. He has contributed to the *Philosophical Review* and other journals.]

■ ■ ■

Alfred G. Aronowitz: The trouble with being a Jew has always been the trouble others go through to remind you of it. Today, of course, the reminders have undergone certain refinements. Where we once had Adolf Hitler to do this job for us, we now have David Ben Gurion. Where we once had the Pharaohs, we now have the presidents of the synagogues. Where we once had the Inquisition, we now have the United Jewish Appeal. To be sure, we also still have Gamal Abdul Nasser, the Ku Klux Klan, George Lincoln Rockwell, and the Scarsdale Country Club. But if invoking the Jewishness of a Jew can be an offense, then at what degree is it not? For my part, I advocate the immediate suspension of COMMENTARY.

As Thelonius Monk once said to Allen Ginsberg, "What do all those people mean walking around saying they're white?" Or, in Ginsberg's paraphrase, "What do all those people mean walking around saying they're Negro?" Man's tendency for ethnic cohesion may be as much a part of him as his yearning for individuality. But ultimately the one, as a fact of life, must be reconciled with the other, as life's essence. With the Jew, looked upon through the centuries as the natural enemy of much of the rest of mankind, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yearning to be looked upon as an individual has become an eternal crusade. Unfortunately, it is less of an internal one. The very persons who have led the crusade have also founded the B'nai B'rith, the American Jewish Congress, the Hadassah, and, to some extent, the State of Israel. By definition, the man who claims to represent Jewish thought must claim first that he is a Jew. Would the Mayor of the Ghetto give up his job?

"Aronowitz," a friend said to me recently, "the trouble with you is that you treat your being a Jew as an affliction rather than as a matter of pride." Perhaps he is right, but in a lifetime when being born a Jew has been punishable by death, I believe that pride falls somewhat short of an effective antidote. Certainly it is little more than an emotion of self-defense. In the armory of the ethnic mercenaries, there are few stronger platitudes, and yet what is a platitude and where is the justification for pride? My brother-in-law, a Detroit Tigers fan to this day, says that every time Hank Greenberg hit a home run he rejoiced, first in the fact that Hank Greenberg was a Jew and only afterward in the score. But the question remains: did Hank Greenberg smite the enemy in the name of Judaism or in the name of the Detroit Tigers? Einstein, Disraeli, Mendelssohn, Modigliani, and Freud were Jews, but Einstein also was a violinist, Disraeli also was an Englishman, Mendelssohn also was a Lutheran, Modigliani also was an alcoholic, and Freud also smoked cigars. Are violinists, Englishmen, Lutherans, alcoholics, and cigar-smokers to be enjoined from the glory of their fellow members? The contribution of Jews to the culture of the world is unquestioned, but in the final analysis, is it the contribution of persons acting as Jews or the contribution of persons acting as individuals?

MAKE NO MISTAKE. I often am deeply conscious of the fact that I am a Jew. I would never, for example, buy a Volkswagen and I can appreciate jokes about newspapers on the floor. Jews at all moments of history have shared some sort of common experience, and, whatever else they have been, they have been as much the products of their heritage—just as Roman Catholics, Zulus, or the inhabitants of the Principality of Liechtenstein have been the products of theirs. Even Allen Ginsberg has written a work entitled *Kaddish*. But heritages keep being added to and culture, on any given day, is the sum total of all the culture which preceded it. When Ben Gurion complains that Jewish traditions are being obliterated throughout the Diaspora and because of it, he forgets that the clocks are running in Israel, too. In twenty years, the jokes won't be about newspapers on the floor.

Ben Gurion says that he is a Jew first and an Israeli second. I say that I am nothing if I am not an individual. Actually, there is nothing less important than being a Jew. Whether you smoke a cigarette is more important. Whether your fingernails are clean is more important. Whether you make love to your wife is more important. Whether the Detroit Tigers win the pennant is more important. My brother-in-law has felt other moments of pride. As a matter of fact, being a Jew is so unimportant that I accuse whoever is reading this of a grand waste of time. That is the United Jewish Appeal knocking on your door, not the Gestapo. By an irrelevance that remains one of history's tragedies, you can't join the Scarsdale Country Club. Your birth is no one's fault but your parents', and yet no matter where you may pledge your ethnic allegiance, you can't escape the Nuremberg laws. O, Anne Frank, my poor murdered daughter, they think I am laughing at you. Let no man kill me because I am a Jew, but when they are burning Jews again, let me be the first to burn.

[ALFRED G. ARONOWITZ is a staff writer on the New York *Post*, and is currently working on a major study of the Beat Generation.]

■ ■ ■

Aaron Asher: (1) Consult your files, please. All those articles on the situation of the Jew in America! Between us, though, nothing much has happened if we're talking about the *relative* situation—I refer to the historical balance of hostility and acceptance. The prognosis in 1945 was favorable, though there were fears that economic depression might bring anti-Semitism with it. Instead we got xenophobia, anti-intellectualism, military arrogance, a political depression—all the other classic accompaniments of trouble for Jews. Yet, no

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

significant anti-Semitic backlash, even when events like the Rosenberg case provided convenient nuclei. Is this an old-fashioned, Diaspora way of looking at the question? I'm saying that it takes apocalyptic events to influence my attitude: why didn't you go back to what Grace Paley calls "the epidemics of 1940–41," when people "died of Jewishness"?

(2) I realize that your question is merely for guidance, and that objecting to it may be ungracious. Yet I feel that behind the imprecision of "the generation of Jewish intellectuals whose socialism . . ." lies a real confusion, a tendency to think with petrified concepts, groupiness, and a kind of "in" talk that may alienate younger readers from this and other worthy periodicals. Allow me to be obtuse. Does the question refer to the Yiddish-speaking socialists, many of them intellectuals by any standard? To the Stalinists of the 30's and 40's who, flailing Zionism, did so nevertheless with the cracked stick of Biro-Bidjan? To the Trotsky cultists, secretly proud that he was a Jew? To those whose feelings about the fate of Europe's Jewry were surely something more than a humanitarian interest? The cluster of intellectuals who fit the question were small in number, restricted in influence, and were, moreover, largely literary types. Their socialism was almost an afterthought, their non-Jewishness mainly a revolt of sensibility against limiting bourgeois origins. What *single* tradition the entire generation represented, I don't know —whatever remains viable in socialism, I suppose, plus a certain aesthetic, and a tough critical attitude perhaps ultimately derived from but going beyond ordinary Jewish skepticism.

(3) Yes, of course. The point—now frequently made and possibly true—that American Jewish writers are exemplars of alienation, instructors in grief and wit, and thus particularly in tune with the new questioning America, can be extended. Uncle Sam is becoming the world's Jew. Items: the familiar accusations of arrogance, rigid moralism, materialism, pushiness, secret and overt power; exclusion (Ike's non-trip to Japan); spit and stones (Nixon in South America); "go home" scrawls. A sort of "Jewish" culture, with Jews prominent among the dispensers, therefore should be finding new audiences. And so it is. Nichols and May, Shelley Berman, Mort Sahl—their humor is patently Jewish—have counterparts on other levels and in other arts. Wryness and satire are in the air, and an increasing awareness of the possibilities of pessimism. Hasn't this something to do with the Jewish presence in "communications"? All this, of course, is most diffuse and tentative, yet it seems strangely obvious. Where Jewish culture, in the traditional sense, seems to have no effect on American life, is on the moral front. And American Jews themselves seem to be submerging the ancient virtues (along with the vices) in the moral confusion of our society. I think it significant that the Beat bohemia is the first in a long time to lack a normal share of Jewish adherents. Can this be evidence that the rebellion is a fake? Or have American Jews lost their vocation for social criticism along with everyone else?

(4) IT SHOULD BE EVIDENT by now that I do feel such an obligation. For me, the tradition represents a set of generally congenial ethical principles; an attachment to a history of suffering by kinsmen; valuable character traits (learned, not inherited) and intellectual virtues; and a religion that asks and answers its ultimate questions in a positively sane manner. This obligation or reverence does not necessarily make for involvement in *the* Jewish community, but for connection with *a* Jewish community. Children, one hopes, will adopt some part of one's values. The technique of transmission is subject to time, place, and circumstance.

(5) I do not practice any religion. If my children (as yet unborn) become observant Jews, I'll probably admire their independence, ponder the strangeness of the world, and wonder whether they have more sense than I—or more capability for religious experience. Given my involvement with a Jewish tradition, I would take their conversion to another religion more seriously. In fact, I'd feel betrayed and would consider myself a failed parent. Should religion matter so much to me? No. But my lack of faith prevents me from being able to separate religion from history. And once history appears on the scene, what can I make of Christianity?

(6) Connecting with Israel is like connecting with the Jewish community. Perhaps harder. Who wants to connect with cabinet

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ministers, police, an army, a parliament, parties, political resignations, capital investment, theocratic fanaticism, tourism? Very conventionally, I like the recent immigrants more than the sabras, deplore the attrition of admirable values, wrestle with a distant and strange ecology, disdain the belittlers of Diaspora achievements and Yiddish culture, and—sympathize with the ingathering, approve of the Israelis' choice of enemies, forget myself and admire military feats. Mixed but legitimate feelings. As for comparing performance in the embodiment of Jewish tradition, no one would assign a perfect score to the ghetto or the *shtetl* or the Lower East Side. The returns are not yet in on Levittown and Tel Aviv.

[AARON ASHER is an editor of Meridian Books, a leading quality paperback series, and an associate editor of the literary periodical, *The Noble Savage*.]

■ ■ ■

Werner Cohn: (1) I do not. There may be differences on the surface, but I think that the four fundamental determinants of the position of the Jew in America are (a) the underlying ambivalence between Jew and Christian, originating from religious sources; (b) the setting of a modern, industrial society; (c) the religious diversity and democratic institutions of the country; and (d) the concentration of a large number of Jews in certain metropolitan centers. These four factors, of course, have not changed in recent years, nor are they likely to change in the foreseeable future. They make for an interesting dynamic tension between mutual acceptance and mutual alienation, the former often superficial, the latter profound.

I grant that the demise of the radical movement since the 30's may have altered the style of participation of certain Jewish intellectuals in American culture. I would suggest, however, that these changes may have more affected the form than the content of the relationship between Jewish intellectuals and America. The role of the Jewish scholar, writer, or performer in the 60's may not be so different from that of the Jewish radical in the 30's. In either case, the role tends toward that of a critic, or at least toward that of an outsider in a certain sense. And the general social differences between Jews and Gentiles—this holds not only for the intellectuals—have remained, and may be seen in the characteristic Jewish occupational and geographic distributions, as well as in persisting differences in political attitudes.

(2) Some features of the socialists' hostility toward Jewishness were quite naive. The socialist faith, which in theory promised to destroy all barriers between men, kept many from seeing the stubborn non-rational, non-religious (though religiously derived) barriers between Jews and Christians. An extreme of this position was described by Pavel Axelrod, a Russian Jewish Narodnik, reminiscing about the pogroms of 1882:

"We . . . just as all Narodniks, were happy at the news, for we thought that the pogroms were a sign of the Russian revolution. We thought that the attacks would go beyond the Jew. We felt that the Jews were the swindlers. We weren't concerned with the pogroms. We belonged to the Russian folk. How childish and naive we were!"

However, I continue to be very much in sympathy with certain other aspects of the socialist position on Judaism. I refer to the refreshing radical agnosticism, which is like a sudden bit of fresh air in a room full of *brocheh*-reciting Hadassah ladies and cigar-smoking B'nai B'rith gentlemen. Let me add that what I object to is not so much religion as sloppy and sentimental religiosity. To my mind, there are indeed at least two ways of being a good Jew. I recently met a Hasid from Alberta whom I, the atheist, immediately recognized as a fellow good Jew.

(3)-(4) I regard my Jewishness as something that is given, something one cannot obliterate, something one must come to terms with in one way or another. Jews differ in the way they are Jews, not in whether or not they continue their Jewishness. Any discussion of good ways of being Jewish is a good discussion.

Some of my Jewish acquaintances solve the matter by becoming Unitarians. This, like any conversion to Christianity, is still a way of being Jewish, though not, to my mind, a good way. Despite the fact that one of my favorite quotations comes from a Unitarian source and seems to me quite Jewish (Emerson: "Let me admonish you, first of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all, to go alone, to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imaginations of men"), the Unitarian way (for a Jew!) is not much different from the old socialist naivety—the Narodnik's fallacy—which assumes that a Jew can, by his own decision, cease being a Jew in the eyes of others.

I like to regard my Jewishness as a source of strength in my relationship to the world. The Jew is symbolic of, among other things, the outsider, the one who stands alone, the one who follows his inner direction while others mock. The great models are Jesus, Freud, Marx, Einstein, and Trotsky. Following this course without compromise means to make a significant and, to me, authentically Jewish contribution to American culture.

(5) Being both Jewish and in a sense an opponent of all religion, I cannot say that I would be happy to see my children join a non-Jewish faith. However, as there are good ways of being Jewish though religious within Judaism, there may be good ways of being Jewish though religious in other traditions. Should one of my children decide that his own life is best led as a Hutterite, Doukhobor, or Jesuit (their new regulations would allow it!), I might be persuaded that the decision is in its own way a good Jewish one. Were he to become a Christian Scientist or a follower of the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, I would more certainly feel that I had somehow failed to make my way of being Jewish attractive enough to him.

In any case, many conversions of Jews to Christianity seem to me to involve rather severe problems of self-identification. Very frequently, there is an element of disingenuousness—an attempt to pass as something one obviously isn't.

(6) I do. While I accept much of the anti-Zionist criticism of the *Jewish Newsletter* and Erich Fromm (though I wish it were less shrill), I feel myself involved with Israel and grateful for its existence. Our whole family recently attended a Chanukah celebration of a mildly Labor Zionist youth group. As always, I winced at the prayers and also at the manipulating professional "youth leader," but when the *Horah* was danced and my little girl enjoyed dancing with the others, I was pleased that she had this way of making up for Christmas. I saw that the liberating spirit of free adolescents was still about, and that the way of the *halutz* is still indeed a good way of being a Jew in the Gentile world. This way I recognize mainly for adolescents, but that is another story.

[WERNER COHN is assistant professor of sociology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.]

■ ■ ■

Malcolm L. Diamond: It is now apparent that the much publicized revival of religion that has taken place in this country since the Second World War has been a revival of formal religious affiliation rather than of religious faith. Our age is not an age of return; it has more properly been characterized as an age of longing. Socialism, scientism, and other secular ideologies have been found wanting as objects of total allegiance and this has induced a groping for a new focus of ultimate concern. This groping is especially poignant in Jewish circles because the phenomenal success of the Zionist movement in helping to create the State of Israel has robbed Zionism of much of the fervor that enabled it to serve as a substitute for religion for so many American Jews.

If it is to be satisfied, the religious longing of American Jews must be satisfied here, in the United States; emigration to Israel is no answer. I say this not because emigration is impractical, but because Diaspora Judaism is a source of that peculiar insight that comes from living on the margin of alien cultures, an insight best expressed in the verse: "Do not oppress a stranger, you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." This insight stands at the heart of the prophetic heritage and of the Jewish thirst for social justice that enriches the life of any culture with which Jews interact. In saying this, we must remember Nathan Glazer's salutary corrective to self-righteousness about Jewish participation in the fight for social justice; it was not our prophetic heritage but our position as a minority seeking full enfranchisement that has, in recent history, been primarily responsible for this participation. But this underscores the point that it is in the Diaspora, with its peculiar pressures,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that this most valued part of the Jewish heritage is apt to be activated. Nor should we overlook the fact that from the time of Abraham and Moses great visions have been granted to Israel outside the land.

In this age of longing, Jewish students and intellectuals often seek Jewish authenticity on a Protestant model. They read thinkers such as Buber and Heschel who play the same role that Niebuhr and Tillich play in Protestant circles, namely, that of mediators of the traditional faith to modern man. I myself have traveled this way. In a period of estrangement from Judaism, I was deeply impressed by the intellectual vitality of contemporary Protestant thinkers and, in studying them, I was directed to the creative Jewish thinkers of our time, especially to Martin Buber, who helped me along the road to a reaffirmation of Judaism.

I have since discovered that this kind of theologically-oriented approach to Judaism is far too limited. An extended sojourn in a Torah-centered atmosphere (at Jews' College, the Orthodox rabbinical seminary in London) provided a sense of the vastness of Jewish studies, and a deeper realization of the fact that they are not primarily theological. No one can properly assess the Jewish attitudes toward God and man, sin and redemption, without being familiar with the word of Torah as it has resonated through centuries of prayer and commentary. Of course, learning is no panacea. Scholars who have immersed themselves in every stratum of the tradition disagree as to just what constitutes an authentic Jewish approach even to fundamental issues. However, there is a vast difference between informed judgment—sensitive to the nuances of a vast body of literature and to the total context of Jewish life and thought—and opinions based upon selections from a limited number of Jewish texts.

In Jews' College I discovered a community of understanding that constituted a world unto itself. The Torah provided the matrix of daily existence and conversations were peppered with quotations from every aspect of Jewish literature. Here Judaism was self-authenticating; there was no agonizing over the "Why" of Jewish existence because the answer was embedded in the very act of living Torah. In this connection I recall a lunch at the College in the company of a number of students, one of them a rabbi in his mid-forties who was engaged in advanced Talmudic studies. He was an ineffectual man who could not sustain his end of the conversation, continually climbing on the back of what he conceived to be the intelligent observations of others. But in the chanting of the benediction at the conclusion of the meal he was transfigured; his face became vibrant, his voice confident, he was a Jew before his God, a man. It is obvious that this kind of religion cannot be marketed by peace of mind cults, but neither can it be attained by the most strenuous exercises in Jewish theology. It can only develop out of a Judaism that takes the total heritage seriously, and that means a Judaism that takes education seriously.

Education is crucial because it enables a generation to move beyond it own limitations. From the religious standpoint the Jewish people may be regarded as a womb out of which may be reborn that faith in God that makes the preservation of Judaism a meaningful goal. Without education the people cannot serve this function, and faithlessness—which in the generation of the parents may have been an honest reaction to the Jewish heritage—is imposed by default upon the children who lack any basis for authentic response and intelligent judgment.

Looking at American Judaism with a concern for educational stringency, one finds two hopeful signs: the increasingly high caliber of college graduates electing the rabbinate and the continued growth of the Jewish day or parochial school. But proponents of Jewish education in depth ought not to obscure the fact that the Judaism it seeks to inculcate is highly problematical in the American setting. Although traditional Judaism in this country is largely attuned to American ideals, it nevertheless imposes an exclusiveness that is oppressive in this land of the melting-pot. The existence of the secular Jew often seems vacuous when compared to the melodious life of the religious Jew; but the secular Jew who has fully participated in contemporary culture is likely to feel constricted in a Torah-centered atmosphere, even in one that is relatively open culturally.

In any event, Jews with a command of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jewish literature are very much in the minority. For all the return to religion in the past fifteen years, the American Jewish community remains a community of citizens of Western civilization seeking Jewish roots rather than a community of Jews seeking a rapport with Western civilization. The estranged Jew of today does not have a Torah-centered community to provide the rhythms and gratification for which he would then find a rationale. Therefore, an intellectual approach to Judaism, whatever its limitations, must be the major mode of access for Jews seeking a return.

In past ages, a religious thinker could engage in theology with a profound sense of the difficulties involved but with confidence that answers were to be won. In our age, the theological enterprise itself has become questionable and with it religion. While I stand in awe of all that Judaism has been, and of its compelling witness to the God of our fathers—feeling arrogant at demanding that it somehow justify itself to a "sensitive and enlightened intellectual"—honesty demands a critical posture. It is one thing to say that I cannot believe in the God of the fathers *in the way* they believed in Him, it is another thing to wonder as to whether one can believe in Him at all. Faith remains more a struggle than a gift, but for me it is the crucial Jewish struggle, since a Judaism without God strikes me as idolatrous tribalism.

[MALCOLM L. DIAMOND is assistant professor of religion at Princeton and the author of *Martin Buber: Jewish Existentialist* (1960).]

■ ■ ■

Jason Epstein: I am writing this from Lagos, the capital of Nigeria, a city of several hundred thousand Africans who live for the most part in a sea of excrement and regularly bury their relatives under the living room floor. The squalor is at first overwhelming, but gradually one senses that this does not translate itself directly into human suffering but into a positive, hour-by-hour struggle to survive whose cumulative drama becomes one's main impression of Lagos. In these circumstances, COMMENTARY's questions concerning Jewishness seem remote and a little bizarre. But not entirely. There is, for example, the solitary Israeli businessman to be seen in the elevators at the Federal Palace Hotel. He is different from the others. The Japanese go around in threes and fours, always grinning and in the freshest white shirts. They are businessmen too, but they could just as well be table tennis champions. The Germans go about in larger groups, talking endlessly and festooned with cameras and guidebooks, earnest and puzzled. But the Israeli is always to be seen alone, dourly gliding up the elevator shafts clutching his Hebrew newspapers. He seems worried and far away from home. And he reminds me that my contribution to COMMENTARY'S symposium is long overdue.

One's first thoughts, thinking of the Jews, are of course of the concentration camps which taught us something new about the human condition. We had long suspected the fallibility of our species and theologians have dwelt extensively on human depravity. But nothing had quite prepared us for Auschwitz and as every serious person now knows, our species can never recover the dignity lost in this astonishing demonstration of behavior which would be shocking in wild animals. Jews are also human before they are anything else and therefore what we know to be true of humanity at large, we know must also be true of Jews themselves, even though they happened to be the particular victims of this outrageous suffering. We all have less reason now to be confident that humanity is the culmination of a process tending toward perfection. For those who still have doubts, there is always the hydrogen bomb to contemplate.

These are the first thoughts inspired by COMMENTARY's questions: that preeminently I represent a biological phenomenon whose value on earth is much to be doubted. One spends his time in the effort to prove the contrary, and in Lagos the opportunities to do so seem to abound, but still one goes about his work somewhat resigned. That I am also a Jew seems relatively unimportant, but perhaps I am missing a point. The facts are these: I was born a Jew of Jewish parents and as far as I know (which is not very far) there have never been any exceptions in my family. My maternal grandparents who are still alive have lived in Maine for sixty years and speak Yiddish

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a Yankee accent. My own parents had no interest in Jewishness and I was never confirmed. I was raised in a town where there were no other Jews, and almost no anti-Semitism that I could perceive. If I had looked, I might have found some. But it didn't occur to me to look. My son, whose name is Jacob, to offset the euphemism of my own, may become a Jew or anything else he chooses. I doubt that I'll care, though I don't understand the religious impulse and would be puzzled to find it in him. Many of my friends are Jewish intellectuals, but almost none of my friends are not intellectuals, and most intellectuals are Jews. I don't really understand this phenomenon, but I doubt that it proves anything about either Jews or intellectuals. I have been in a synagogue three times in my life that I can recall, and the last two occasions were a wedding and a funeral.

ISRAEL IS AN admirable experiment about which I know very little but some of whose aims are laudable. It would be good to live in a country where a national language presumably reverberates and where political activity may have real consequences. But I doubt it will work. It is too much a creature of will and not enough the result of long, slow organic history. Like Togoland, or for that matter Disneyland, its foundations are too visible for its future to seem secure. Nor is it mainly the Jewishness that impresses me about Israel but the political skill and creative energy that have gone into it.

I have the impression that the traditional human groupings are on the way out. As we hear of new cultures and watch new societies grow, the old ones seem less inevitable. We are all pretty much alone in the world and if we are honest with ourselves, there is little real comfort to be found in the conventional alignments. Perhaps it would be good to feel oneself engaged in a highly auspicious tradition. But I happen not to and don't feel at one with those who do.

[JASON EPSTEIN, as editor in chief of Doubleday's Anchor Books series, was generally credited with having inaugurated the quality paperback revolution in American publishing. He is currently a vice president of Random House and editor in chief of its Modern Library.]

Irving Feldman: I doubt that the situation of the Jew in America has changed radically during the past fifteen years—it has only become more so. On the one hand, my generation, which seems to have been born half-assimilated, has grown up; on the other, democratic apostolic inclusiveness has extended itself more generously toward the Jews, largely because circumstances have placed us further this side of xenophobia. Judaism, Jewishness, Jewish identity—these are fundamentally, that is, most vitally, a *church* constituted by the communion of all individual Jews with the history of the Jewish nation and its relation to God. So, the present existence of the Jewish nation is founded on its sense of its historical continuity and of its election and apartness—after two thousand years how could the Diaspora be anything but an end in itself? or so it seems to me in my relative comfort—and the American assimilation of the Jew must end in the complete digestion of the Jewish nation here. Whether for good or for ill I don't know, but it seems clear that, in the easily foreseeable future, there will be in America only individual Jewish consciousnesses and personal Jewish identities. And somewhere up above these, the "values inherent in Jewish tradition," having escaped from the social body that made them meaningful and now grown abstract, mysterious, legendary, transcendent, will float like so much "space junk." Without a Jewish nation, these "values" and identities can be little more than bibelots, interesting conversation pieces somewhere between the scar of an operation and a bewildering dream.

Perhaps I can add a new instance of this commonly observed phenomenon of decadence-and-transcendence. I am thinking of the shift in the meaning of "messianism." For the Talmud-centered Jewishness of the disenfranchised, self-contained ghetto and *shtetl,* messianism was the customary passive expectation of deliverance. But among second-generation American Jews, who, like Kafka's Chinese "live under no contemporary [Jewish] law," the Talmud is inoperative and unknown and our main contact with the Jewish past comes through the Bible. We are, so to speak, the involuntary Protestants of Judaism. For my generation, therefore, messianism has largely come to mean a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mission, a *messiahship* in which each Jew must imitate the patriarchs and prophets, in which he is responsible not only for the deliverance of the Jews but also for the perfection of the world (or in which the world is responsible to him for its imperfection). No living society ever set its members such impossible, deranged tasks.

Those other Jewish values—ethicalness and communalism—that are closest to me have undergone a similar transformation. By "ethicalness," I mean a sense of living under a broad and clear law, coupled with a desire to reduce all situations to simple moral choices; a capacity for ethical inspiration; a feeling that the soul is at its most healthful tension when one is engaged in judging and blessing, in acting righteously; and, finally, a sense that one's true adversary can be located and made palpable, can be grappled with. I suppose this is what used to be called the Hebraic spirit. It is old-fashioned and patriarchal, and probably not specifically Jewish. Whatever its provenance, it stands counter to the lust for psychic consumption, the professionalism and cynicism, the mass-anonymity and spurious "personalizations," the traffic in merely social identities with its accompanying dream of being "alienated," a stranger, an outsider, the titillations of self-righteousness, and the impalpability of moral choices that go to make up the fog of the American moral climate. But without any tangible and living law, this Jewish ethical appetite now devours itself in endless self-inquisitions, in self-accusation and self-pity. (This is, again, general for all social breakdown and in our time. A great theme of modern literature is the self-consciousness produced when, in Pirandello's metaphor, there is no "author.")

Similarly, our communalism—our sense that the Jewish nation is prior to the individual Jew, who possesses, therefore, no private destiny but only the corporate destiny of the Jewish folk—this, too, has ceased to be a ground, has become a burden. The breakdown of the Jewish nation in America has issued, then, in the ultimate persecution of the Jews: our persecution by our own Jewishness, by our sense of having betrayed the Jewish mission. We are the twice-circumcised. Once, to mark us of the nation; again, by our own hands, to mutilate the Jew within us.

And yet those Biblical figures are not solely "self-born mockers of man's enterprise," for they enable me to conceive of a "tradition" and "values" that go beyond the categories of a social pathologist who would identify the lost vitality of the corpse before him. Insofar as Jewish tradition is a living thing for me, it is the always enlarging and edifying sentiment, deriving mainly from the Biblical tales I knew as a child, that I live within a community or family extending in space and time far beyond my own biographical circumstances. Telling of the passage of generations, following an Isaac or Jacob from youth into old age, setting these heroic fathers in judgment over the living father, these tales purify the child's ideals of the accidents of his biography. And so these figures are now the society of my imagination; they provide a source of power that seems to make my knowledge morally sufficient—or would, were I called on to do more than make poems, have thoughts, build systems, take positions.

I have a Romantic painting in my head whose theme is the decline of the Decalogue into the ethics of fair play of the streets of New York. It shows the Marquis of Queensbury receiving the Tables of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Well, this is a moth-eaten image, but let it stand for the incompleteness and confusion of my Jewishness, the neither-American-nor-Jew of the secular Jewishness of many second-generation American Jews. No less moth-eaten is the sentiment—whimsical, embarrassed, nostalgic—that has gone to form this image. Let *it* stand for my relation to Jewish culture, past and present. A relation that is merely sentimental, made up of feelings more or less strong that never become actual, never develop into choices.

For the rest, my horror of the sacerdotal is such that I would be discomfited were a child of mine to convert to any religion. For the part of me that entertained messianic hopes for the kibbutz movement, the State of Israel is a disappointment; another part of me has learned to enjoy the goods of the Diaspora and welcomes the State of Israel as its scapegoat of salvation.

[IRVING FELDMAN, who teaches English at Kenyon College, has a volume of poems, *Works and Days*, to be published by Atlantic-Little Brown in September.]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Herbert Gold: (1) Fifteen years ago anti-Semitism was still a semi-acceptable social attitude. Now the pressure from outside on individual Jews to remain separate from other Americans has been much diminished. If they still remain partly separate, it is less likely to be because of ghetto habits or fears; but it may also arise from the positive belief that, within the Jewish tradition of finding virtue here and soon, on earth, rather than in heaven, there is an important guide to all the perplexed.

Jewish pleasure in the senses, Jewish risk-taking and daring, Jewish generosity and originality all provide sources of my own non-religious pride in a family tradition. The State of Israel gives special support to a history of holding fast. Today the Jew has an exhilarating choice among several alternatives: to accept Judaism as a religion and/or a national identification, to accept assimilation, or to draw a complex strength from solidarity with Jewish history while remaining nonetheless unambiguously committed to the fate of America. (These complicated choices overlap, of course. No important choice is pure.)

Platonic idealism in various corrupt forms has led the world to the edge of suicide. I hope that something like Jewish practicality —present also in non-Jews!—can build both personal and social means toward the preservation of humankind on earth.

(2) Jewish intellectual socialism was often a curious outcropping of abstraction against a mountain of practical injustices and horrors. The intensity of the Jewish radical's rebellion against a day-to-day confrontation of reality ran an exact parallel to the intense day-to-day struggle of the majority of American Jews in the commercial community. An element of reaction against the Jewish community will probably diminish as the intellectual's bond with that community is weakened. Middle-class, time-serving, togethered Jews are too much like all other time-serving, togethered Americans to be singled out for despair. There is a danger here: much of the originality of Jews seemed to come from this tension between their aspirations in the middle—Jewish and non-Jewish hostility at either end. What a waste if psychological homogenizing reduces passion and discipline!

(3) My experience as a Jew partly locates me as an American—especially with the practical, meliorative, answer-seeking side of Americans. It has protected me from the passivity of much of American life: I *know* that there is no heaven, that like a peddler I can carry only what is on my back and in my head, that what I do is what I am, that I am responsible for my fate. This Jewish acceptance of what the world offers, an energetic rather than a passive acceptance—a continual redefinition of the terms of life—contributes an important element in the American style. As a writer, I find Mark Twain and Thoreau "Jewish" in this way. The Jewish contribution reinforces a general pattern in American life, with individual men of genius sounding their individual notes.

(4)–(5) The implications of Jewish religious doctrine and ritual are important to me. For example, the weakness of the rabbi in the synagogue I find very appealing; the fact that every man follows his own lead in prayer is a significant difference between Judaism and most forms of Christianity. But this pride in Jewish individualism is very far from faith in doctrine. My identification with Jewish aspiration, suffering, and dignity is far from providing a total identification for myself as a Jew. Because of my own history, I choose to describe myself as a Jew—it is a part of my fiber—but I see no way of turning history back for my children. They will know other pains and joys of growth in a different period of history. Vividness cannot be willed outside of the given possibilities of a life. I believe it unlikely that my children will convert to any religion. I would be puzzled if they became religious Jews, also. I suspect that the Temple branch of the Girl Scouts does not provide much stimulus for religious crisis.

The special values which the Jewish people have created and transmitted will survive, if at all, through other institutions than the religious ones. The problems of our lives are political, social, economic, and also moral. I see no chance of solving the ethical problems through a Jewish community life in which the normally religious element has inevitably been "adjusted" to the fact that it is no longer a serious matter except for isolated individuals. Chicken

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

soup and Yiddish jokes will tarry awhile. But the history of the Jews from now on will be one with the history of everybody else.

(6) I feel both a sentimental and social connection with the State of Israel: sentimental because of my history as a Jew, social because of a hope for Israel's growth as an exemplary force. To some extent this personal interest in Israel is contradictory. But family feeling is strong and can perhaps be justified simply as a fact of human nature (the alternative is the perversity—"Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself"—explored in the Platonic dialogue, "The Euthyphro").

The freshness of danger, the vigor and intelligence disposed for public purposes, the sense of public hope which permeates life in Israel—these elements bring me closer to Israel than to the American Jewish community. Though for it too I suffer complex family attitudes, as I do for all of American life, which I despise, hate, fear, admire, relish, love. The American Jewish community is most important to me as a writer because it is a mirror in which the rest of America can be seen. Like all mirrors, it invites distortion.

[HERBERT GOLD is the author of two collections of short stories and four novels, the latest of which, *Therefore Be Bold,* was published last year.]

■ ■ ■

Enoch Gordis: (1) Bigotry is less fashable nowadays, due in part to relative prosperity, in part to frequent public presentations of intergroup problems. This change has no bearing on my attitudes toward Judaism.

(2) I refrain from the obvious detailed exposition of the combination of rebelliousness, *Selbsthass,* and idealism which spawned the Jewish socialist, who, by the way, owed much to the tradition he despised. I believe there is no viable element in this movement, because being Jewish is now respectable in America and the welfare state has adopted much of the old socialist platform.

(3) Jewish culture has many subtle and indirect influences on American life. But to determine if in total they are significant, consider for a moment what would happen if all the Jews were to disappear from America. Except for the loss of a slight Yiddish tone to New York City, the change would be undetectable in that America which extends from the Atlantic to the far Pacific.

(4) The two words in defining a person's relation to his tradition, "historical reverence" and "obligation," are not equivalent. I may have great regard for a museum of antiquities and not want to fill my house with them. On the other hand, participation in cyclic rituals and institutional activities does not necessarily imply a genuine regard for the tradition they are supposed to be part of.

My present position is an often inconsistent mixture of conviction, habit, and weighted practical alternatives.

I am firmly rooted in the Jewish tradition, having grown up happily in a richly Jewish home. I believe that in four key respects Judaism is unsurpassed in Western religion. (A) It has consistently applied its ethical insights, for which its spokesmen showed a remarkable talent very early in history, to a variety of mundane matters, at the same time keeping its sights on distant goals such as universal peace. (B) It is *explicitly* tolerant of other points of view. (C) It makes minimum demands on credulity, and concentrates on the human, physical, and practical. Knowledge and action are paramount over faith. It is refreshingly free from cloying otherworldliness, emetic concern for the "soul," and biological nonsense. (D) It has led, in its adherents, to a frequent and attractive combination of attitudes: idealism and skepticism.

This much said for the "reverence," I now confess that my feeling of "obligation" has been attentuated for several reasons. (A) I can accept no theology, since theological assertions are invariably arranged so that experimental validation of their consequences is logically as well as practically impossible. (B) Ethical insights, in my view, are in principle derivable from many sources, so the Jewish religion and others are dispensable in this regard. I must also reject the theological concept of sin when applied to both unethical behavior, and, *a fortiori,* ritual disobedience. (C) I am impatient with institutional activities, and find the quality of verbal and musical expression in communal worship intolerably bad.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pushed to their legitimate conclusion, these attentuating forces might render my "obligation" nil. For several reasons, however, I have not wished to throw out the whole structure despite its unacceptable philosophic foundation. (A) The holiday observances and many of the home rituals are beautiful, and like any art which has taken centuries to find its current expression, they ought not to be dismissed without seriously considering whether the loss is not greater than the gain in consistency. The values which the holidays stress and ornament are those to which I subscribe, despite my rejection of their "official" derivation. Deaf to any "divine imperative," I reserve the right to choose my observances. (B) A significant gap in the emotional resources of many modern children is their inability to feel reverence for anything. Reverence is an attitude which must be learned, and once learned, is transferred easily to new areas. Children learn it by seeing adults behave in a manner that suggests that solemn, important, and permanent things are being considered. Regarded in this light, the unacceptable philosophic basis for many observances should be occasionally neglected. (C) If the Jewish tradition is not indispensable for the derivation of ethics, it certainly has served as the vehicle for their transmission. The Jewish tradition is the one whose language I know, whose nuances I fathom, whose insights are expressed in a variety of contexts with which I identify. I can summon no other language to speak them to my children. I do not doubt, however, that my position leads to a gradual attrition of the specifically Jewish after a few generations, but for me, at present, there is no alternative.

(5) I believe that most Americans can lead a fruitful, decent, and happy life in any of the popular religious traditions. I have the uneasy feeling that in most cases, religious conversion in America in any direction reflects more on the emotional instability of the person involved than on the merits of the religions. Ignorance of one's own traditions is an ancillary cause. What my wife and I can do to repair the ignorance our children were born with and to make them secure, we will do. After that, the future is out of our hands, and I spend no more time worrying about conversion than about the possibility they may some day have diabetes.

(6) Israel has and will continue to have my sympathy. Israel, however, is not concerned with my sympathy except when it leads to financial support or useful pressure on Washington.

That the zeal of the "kibbutzniks" and other early settlers reflected the ultimate in the practice of Jewish ethics is obvious. It would be naive to expect anything other than what has happened: a thinning out of the initial idealism, and the emergence of racial bigotry, political machinations, and an excess of nationalism. Whatever the proportion of the wonderful and the less-than-wonderful in Israel—and the former predominates—it is meaningless to ask whether Israel "embodies" Jewish values more than America. Israel *is* the continuing Jewish tradition, the tradition which contains villains and fools, as well as prophets and scholars.

[ENOCH GORDIS, M.D., received his specialist training in internal medicine at Mt. Sinai hospital and is now a research fellow at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research.]

■ ■ ■

Philip Green: As a political radical I take an oblique approach to the subject matter of this symposium. My feelings about both Jewishness and American society derive from my radicalism and suggest essentially a single answer to the various questions you have listed for discussion.

As I understand it, the ethical tradition of Judaism is, like the ethical tradition of Christianity, on the whole incompatible with the practical requirements of the kind of society we have created in the Western world. I believe that Christianity has long since clearly betrayed its origins (with the exception of a few minor sects such as the Quakers). About Judaism, however, I feel somewhat differently. Although the Jewish tradition undoubtedly contains many elements of authoritarianism, it also has had a strong undercurrent of concern for humaneness and social justice throughout its existence. Due perhaps to the enforced social iso-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lation and minority status of Jews wherever they lived—which of necessity impelled at least a passive resistance to the organized societies around them—that aspect of the Jewish tradition was for a long time able to remain partially true to itself, and continually to produce a leavening ferment of teachers and prophets who helped to justify Judaism's existence; at least until the recent past, that is, Jewish life could in some sense be held meaningfully accountable to that part of the Jewish tradition. I am greatly concerned, therefore, that the twin advent in the West of "Liberalism" and modern nationalism, with their doctrine of national citizenship for all (which tends to integrate minority groups into the greater society), are in the process threatening to destroy the little that has remained of the integrity of Jewish culture —the integrity inherent in being an opposition element in the modern world.

American liberalism in particular has presented its (immigrant) minority groups with a simple, attractive, and ultimately destructive prospect. If they were but willing to discard their traditional cultural values—values which have usually been reactionary with regard to the pursuit of capitalist affluence—they would then be allowed to participate with almost equal opportunity in the fight for material well-being which has been the most obvious value of American society. Since the end of poverty and even of persecution and discrimination (though I think much of the latter still remains) is held out as the reward of full assimilation, it cannot be surprising that most Jews, in common with their fellow-immigrants, have snatched at the offer.

But what a price the reward carries with it! Everything positive which was contained in the culture the immigrant Jews brought with them (and though I know of it only through hearsay, I feel quite certain that it was profoundly superior to the dominant culture of their new nation) has been given up along with the ghetto: smashed, shattered, almost totally destroyed. For what? Not for the fine words of the Declaration of Independence (that might have been a fair trade), but for the casual acceptance of violence and corruption, the pursuit of the fast buck, and the uncompromising "cash nexus" between man and man, which together constitute so crucial a part of American culture during the past century. All that is left from the old ways is a vague sense of social responsibility—the welfare board syndrome; all that can be said for American Jews is that perhaps slightly more than other Americans they attempt to demonstrate the truth of Adam Smith's contention that the pursuit of private good adds up to an overall public good, but the connection between the two types of "good" grows more tenuous every day. Too often, they go into the professions and charge high fees and try to avoid wasting too much time in the clinics; they move to the suburbs and adopt the peculiarly complete form of selfishness that pervades suburban America; worst of all, they move South and learn to "understand" the abomination of segregation. Seeing their choice as one between "Americanism" and Judaism, and electing to choose the former whenever a real conflict arises, they have lost sight of the one alternative which would be true to the essential meaning of each: to behave as humane individuals building a humane society.

ALL THIS would be much more acceptable if the Jewish intellectuals too were not implicated in the trend which finds salvation in the capitalist welfare state. When the intellectuals "assimilate" and "accommodate," then nothing defensible can be left of Jewish values. For the role of Jewish intellectuals especially should be the role of all intellectuals, anywhere: to dissent, to oppose, to prophesy. The Jewish socialists and other radicals of the earlier part of this century were no doubt shortsighted in some ways: they emphasized material goals too much, and thus were hopelessly compromised by the economic achievements of World War II and the postwar welfare state. Otherwise, however, the only thing wrong with their political tradition is the ease with which so many of them have abandoned it. When they belonged to the broad community of radical politics, they were being faithful to the profoundest traditions of Jewish thought; now that they have deserted that community, they have lost their vocation. They are no longer anything but hangers-on, back-stoppers to the real wielders of power. As such, they share responsibility for every injustice that is per-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mitted to exist in the name of the system which they uphold with tenacious conformity.

Perhaps in a society which was progressively making itself into an approximation of The Good Society, dissent might become superfluous (I doubt it, though). But our society is moving in quite another direction, toward the inhumane combination of neo-feudalism and quasi-totalitarianism that has been perceived and described by Roderick Seidenberg, Lewis Mumford, Erich Kahler, and Erich Fromm, among others. Real political freedom (that is, a genuine relationship to the decision-making process) has become a luxury; the individual's economic freedom is almost completely restricted, except for the ability to engage in the mad consumptionism that rarely gives full satisfaction. The ranks of the millions of exploited remain substantially undiminished since the New Deal, and new—"modern" —methods of exploitation are constantly being devised; the true community of a shared social existence which respects equally both the individual and the group does not exist.

In such a situation a Jew can best fulfill his moral obligations not by becoming especially involved in "the Jewish community" (which is not really a community at all); nor by joining up wholeheartedly with the Americanized majority; but by joining the community of radical political action (as well as by exemplary personal behavior). If one feels, as I do, that some of the special values which have been nurtured by Jewish life—humaneness, resistance to mechanized organized society, an emphasis on social justice—can enrich that community, it will be enough of a "Jewish" contribution to American life and culture to maintain and transmit them. On the other hand, where elements of Judaism conflict with the necessities of radical action and thought, I would drop them instantly, as radical Jews have often done in the past, and call upon others to do the same. For the commitment to broaden the contours of human freedom and justice must take precedence over everything else; to me, the Jewish tradition has no meaning except when it is incident to that greater tradition.

Finally: the commitment I speak of should of course be transmitted to one's children as far as possible. To the extent that it is bound up in one's own mind with one's Jewishness, that too should of course be transmitted—not by means of the formal institutions (which to me seem all too irrelevant), but through the explanation and example of one's total ethical outlook and daily behavior. To do less would be a breach of faith with oneself.

[PHILIP GREEN is an assistant in instruction in the politics department of Princeton University, and has been a contributor to the *New Republic*.]

■ ■ ■

Andrew Hacker: (1) What concerns me is the increasing acceptance of Jews by institutions which have hitherto been closed to them, and the effects of this acceptance upon our outlook and behavior. My feelings on this matter were aroused as a result of what I observed when I was at college a dozen years ago. I went to a small New England college which had thirteen fraternities, none of them Jewish. In the pre-war years this did not matter: the admissions policy of the college was candidly anti-Semitic and there were never enough Jews on the campus to set up a fraternity chapter of their own. Since the end of the war, however, not only has the college been admitting a high proportion of Jews, but in addition the fraternities have been exhibiting an unusual tolerance. Each house takes in several Jews each year, with the result that these students are soon bound in brotherhood to their Gentile classmates. The Jewish boys half-consciously understand that they are expected to dress, talk, act like the Gentiles who have embraced them—though this is never suggested in so many words. They keep their academic grades hovering near the house average; they tend to date Gentile girls. Wanting acceptance, we bend over backward in an exhibit of gratitude when that acceptance is forthcoming. I think we have reached the point where we are blurring the distinction between admittance and acceptance. (Negroes understand this distinction better than we do. They have to.) Quite clearly this problem is going to become accentuated in the whirl of suburban life, in corporate employment, in academic preferment. The toleration we

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have so long asked for is now beginning to have consequences that we may not have the strength to resist.

(2) I have never doubted that Jewish socialism was genuine protest against injustice. But it must also be understood as yet another expression of the Jews' alienation from the established community. Except for isolated pockets, the socialism is gone; the alienation has certainly diminished. The radicalism of the pre-war years was, to my mind, less important as a political movement: its chief contribution was the development among its adherents of a shrewd understanding of man and society. As social scientists Jews have always possessed a profound insight. It does not matter what ideological labels we now assign to men like Ricardo, Marx, Durkheim, or Freud. What is important is that their insight derived from their ability to stand off from society —even from themselves—and see the world as others could not. What impresses me, furthermore, is that so many of the eminent Jewish social scientists of today received their first exposure to the intellectual world as socialists in the 30's. This is not to say that the Marxist lens gave them an accurate depiction of reality. But the Marxist posture encouraged these young students to ask significant questions and to by-pass conventional approaches. The profit, in other words, was intellectual rather than political. My generation has undergone no such initiation. And our work shows it. In terms of the breadth of the subjects we choose for study and in terms of the power of imagination we bring to bear, our efforts are markedly inferior. An intellectual who was a Marxist in the 30's never forgets all of his adolescent lessons. No one should apologize for having such a past, and it is important to note that a substitute for it has yet to be found.

(3)–(4)–(5) The phrase "experience as a Jew" is the key one for me here. Most of my experience has not been as a Jew: the Gentile world has been too hospitable to impress my Jewishness upon me. (Personal note: I do not look like a Jew, my name is not Jewish, people do not usually react to me as a Jew. All this contributes.) What is important, then, is that the environment is not hostile; circumstances do not drive me to find an identity in Jewish culture and the Jewish tradition. But yet: I have a deep pride in this culture and tradition. We *are* superior people—not innately, but because our history has brought out the best in us. (As a teacher in an Ivy League college I am in a position to see that the watershed has been reached. We now admit dumb Jews to my university, not just a handful of smart ones. I suppose some will call it a sign of progress that dumb Jews now have equality of treatment with dumb Gentiles.) Obligations? To continue to retain a Jewish self-consciousness despite the temptations to become a thoroughly assimilated American. (I do not mean becoming a Christian-American; I mean becoming an American-American.) These temptations are particularly powerful because the American establishment is especially happy when Jewish writers and intellectuals celebrate the American way. Jewish praise for American virtues finds a readier market, I often think, than that falling from white Anglo-Saxon Protestant lips. My children? I do not believe that the problem is conversion to Christianity: for one is always a Jew if one's parents are, as any convert soon learns. The problem is intermarriage. However, it is a bit idle to talk of so shaping my children's environment that they will marry Jews as a matter of course. After all, I am happily married to a *shikse* myself, and if I do have suppressed guilt feelings (who can tell?), it is hardly fair to take them out on my children.

(6) I have a profound feeling of identification with Israel, and I have a frank distaste for American Jews who try to disclaim their obligations toward that beleaguered nation. Some of us, I suspect, are trying too hard to be good Americans—100 per cent loyal and no room left over for alien sympathies. But let me be altogether frank in stating what is my personal dilemma. I am also pro-Nasser. I know as well as any Jew that his United Arab Republic presents a mortal threat to Israel. I fervently wish he would turn his aggressive impulses elsewhere. Furthermore, I regard Israel as an advanced nation (probably more sophisticated than the United States), whereas Nasser's UAR is "underdeveloped" in quite a few senses of that term. But I also know that Nasser is carrying out a genuine social revolution in his country and I am fully persuaded that he has the future on his side.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(For the same reasons I sympathize with the Algerian rebel FLN, even though as Moslems they too are potential enemies of Israel.)

In our anxiety over Israel's survival and in our concern for the general security of Western interests, we are apt to forget that the leaders of new nations deserve our encouragement. Nasser stands in the company of Nkrumah of Ghana, Touré of Guinea, Sukarno of Indonesia, and (yes) Castro of Cuba. I believe that he—like them—is dedicated to bettering the condition of life of the ordinary men and women in his part of the world. I am on his side because he represents something I welcome: the awakening of the non-white non-Western world. But I am also on the side of Israel without reservation or qualification. Such an ambiguity of outlook is both tragic and impossible: conciliation and compromise are as far off now as they ever have been. One solution is to get Nasser involved in African affairs, not simply in Algeria but south of the Sahara as well. But I am groping for an answer, and I freely admit my quandary.

[ANDREW HACKER is assistant professor of government at Cornell, and the author of *Political Theory: Philosophy, Ideology, Science,* published in February by Macmillan.]

■ ■ ■

Nat Hentoff: (1) There is markedly less overt anti-Semitism, although there is a considerable residue of diffused distrust of the Jew in large sections of the society. In fear of rejection (less conscious perhaps than it used to be), a majority of Jews—including most of the younger suburbanites—still limit their social relations largely to contacts with other Jews. In this respect, I feel now about my own Jewishness as I did fifteen and more years ago. I reject the perpetuation among many Jews (whose other ties to Jewish culture, let alone religion, are as tenuous as mine) of tight islands of mutual "acceptance." I include Jewish fraternities and sororities, Jewish country clubs, and those absurd Conservative and Reform "temples" where God has become honorary chairman of the UJA, and the Jewish past—when it is evoked at all—is embarrassedly sentimentalized according to the *Haggadah* of Paddy Chayefsky.

(2) I mourn—uselessly—the absence of that generation of Jewish socialists who considered it an obligation and joy to radically question the organization of society (its values as well as its system of production). Certainly there are viable elements in the tradition they represented, but most of those who remain have become all too respectable labor leaders such as David Dubinsky (try to start an old, unrestrained *Yiddishe* debate in *that* union) or such daring, empirical intellectuals as Max Lerner, whose flaccid optimism is an all too symptomatic omnibus of "liberal" clichés. There are a few *young* Jewish radicals who are roughly in the older tradition, but most of them are involved in literary and cultural criticism rather than in politics or in labor. Most of today's "engaged" young "political" Jews are careful warriors in "reform" politics, or if particularly adventurous, in the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. Activity that might lead to more organic and distinctly more uncomfortable social and emotional dislocation is generally regarded as "naive" and "unrealistic." (And what, incidentally, have the younger Jews in Southern congregations been saying publicly about integration? Jews of all generations in the South, in fact, have with very few exceptions been disgracefully self-involved with their own "status" in the community since the Supreme Court decision desegregating schools.)

(3) Growing up as a Jew, I very early and involuntarily acquired some understanding of and empathy with other minorities. I expect, in short, that my concern with civil liberties was first stimulated by being beaten up as a child because I was Jewish. Also, the almost compulsive respect for learning with which I was imbued certainly influenced my early addiction to reading. (Obviously, I could have been exposed to this emphasis on intellect in many other kinds of families, but I *was* taught that this was a rather special vocation of "my people," and accordingly, I may have been even more spurred by this feeling of a tribal obligation not to be a dummy.)

I also, however, reacted negatively to some aspects of my Jewish upbringing; and in that sense, my present beliefs and neuroses are "partly a product of Jewish tradition," or at least the Jewish tradition I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knew. I reacted, over-reacted, to what seemed to me the suffocating "closeness" of Jewish family life which was seldom a spontaneously loving and raging inter-reaction, but rather an almost codified attempt by the parents to finally live a life, through their children. (This kind of "closeness" is hardly exclusive to Jewish families, but I rather think that the *"Yiddishe Mamma,"* by and large, is a particularly lethal example of her international, interracial type.)

I also tried to resist that community contempt for the *"goyishe kop"* which was, of course, one way to keep warm but which produced its own quota of smugness.

I expect, too, that my sense of humor, such as it is, is at least in part "generically" Jewish, although I increasingly find it not too dissimilar from Negro wit, for the usual obvious reasons. I suppose that what I most owe to having been brought up a Jew (in Boston, a particularly anti-Semitic city) was the early realization that I had to depend on myself to get where I thought I might be going. I was conscious of myself as a Jew before I was especially aware of being an "American"; and I don't regret that sequence because the initial feeling of rootlessness insofar as that specific place and culture were concerned made me more "self-reliant," in a way. Later came the acculturation; but being somewhat detached by then, I was able—I think—to be somewhat more selective as to what I chose to be assimilated into. As to whether Jewish culture now exerts a significant influence upon American life, what vital, viable body of Jewish culture is left in America? Jewish culture has become thoroughly influenced *by* American life. No, I do not think Norman Mailer is a "Jewish" writer.

(4) I feel "historical reverence" (your phrase, not mine) and obligations to parts of many traditions, including the Jewish; but I'm not so sure I give priority to the Jewish tradition, having learned more, I feel, from such as Montaigne, Dostoevsky, and Bessie Smith than from my admittedly meager readings in Jewish literature, history, and thought. I do feel "historical reverence" for the Jews' stubborn capacity for survival; but I do not feel there is now a meaningful, autocthonous, continually questioning Jewish tradition per se in America.

I feel no more involvement with the Jewish "community" as a whole than I do with any community. I suppose, in fact, that I currently feel most involved with that section of the Negro community which, while fighting out of its ghetto, is also beginning to question just what it is being "integrated" into. Most "regular" members of the contemporary Jewish community have never thought to ask that question.

WITH REGARD to my children, I expect to tell them what I consider to be those elements of the Jewish past in which they can take whatever pride they may choose to as nominal Jews (for that is exactly what they are, having had even less actual contact with the shape and touch and smell of the Jewish past than I did). I do believe there *were* special values, good and bad, in that past; but in America, those values have become thoroughly blended into the over-all unspecialness of most of our lives.

It will not be as Jews primarily that my children will retain and develop their individuality—if they do. Nor, I hope, will it be primarily as Americans or as members of any other nation-state, religion, etc. I have no illusions that cultural pluralism will end, nor desire for its decline, but I'd like its manifestations to become considerably less restrictive and tribal. I, for example, do not recognize Israel's "right" to try Eichmann.

(5) As an atheist, I hope my children will have no need for any "religion," Judaism included. In any case, since their only present religious observance in a home that is not mine is the lighting of Chanukah candles (sometimes with a Christmas tree as backdrop), they could hardly "convert" *from* anything. If they do eventually choose a religion, I would prefer it not to be either the empty and atavistic ritualism of Orthodox Judaism or the dull charades of Conservative and Reform Judaism. Nor, however, do I have an alternate choice. Better they should stay off both religion and fried foods.

(6) Emotionally, I am drawn to the idea of Israel as a beginning again for those Jews who had no other places to go or no places they wanted to go. I am glad there finally is a "home," however chauvinistic, for any Jew anywhere who wants one—and can get out of where he is. It could not be a home for me, however. I am decidedly unsym-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pathetic to the way Ben Gurion has tried to run the country as a personal fief (nor am I a partisan of the equally "benevolent" Big Brotherism represented by Lavon). I object to such understandable but no less noxious anachronisms as "state religion," laws concerning intermarriage, etc. Basically, I feel thoroughly disconnected from the proliferation in microcosm in Israel of the chronic, aggressive insecurities of all nation-states. (If there were no United Arab Republic, Ben Gurion would have had to invent one.)

As for Israel's embodiment of "the values of the Jewish tradition," I expect it does (though not for long) come closer to a more sharply defined if partial practice of some of those traditions, good and bad, than does the vapid American Jewish community.

[NAT HENTOFF conducts a regular column in the *Village Voice*, and has contributed to a wide variety of magazines, including the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, and the *Reporter*. He is co-editor of three volumes on jazz.]

■ ■ ■

John Hollander: My experience as a Jew is fundamentally relevant to the nature of my experience as an American. It helps to resolve an otherwise ambiguous picture, just as to say that I am in my early thirties, a New Yorker by birth, an academic, and a writer would do.

The question of Jewish identity for writers and intellectuals has in the past fifteen years grown more complicated and at the same time easier to finesse. The over-all situation for the Jew in American life is now more comfortable than it has been since, perhaps, the early years of the 19th century. During the Eisenhower era synagogue affiliation became as respectable—in large urban centers, at any rate—as compliance with the age's balmy injunction to "attend the church of your choice." For intellectuals, the situation has been even more gratifying. Disaffiliated, for the most part, from formal observance; cognitively aware, in varying degrees, of Jewish history and tradition; emotionally linked to a past made viable for them only insofar as it has engaged their own personal histories; sharing a sense of confraternity in a group markedly effective in shaping the very notion of the urban intellectual in America (*vide* Question 2); their lot improved by lacunae in the boundaries against Jewish participation in certain academic fields and in the demi-professions which publicly disseminate The Word; and at the same time unconcerned with the kind of social discrimination against Jews that still obtains in the world of resort hotels and country clubs (their attitude being that if bores want to exclude each other's company on any ground, who could care less?)—Jewish intellectuals in the post-World War II years have in some ways contrived to eat their cake and have it too.

The irony of all this, it seems to me, is that—aside from the dubious significance of knish-eating by gubernatorial candidates, the passage of many Yiddish expressions into the lingua franca of part of the entertainment world, the emergence of suburban, center-oriented Reform congregations as something rather resembling a kind of liberal Protestant sect, and the like—the only interesting influence of Jewish traditions on American life has been exerted, sometimes indirectly, by intellectuals, including some who feel somewhat ambivalent toward those traditions. The elements of Jewish tradition which they pass on are those comprising a kind of critical secular humanism, ironic and historic, valuable to society because of its vantage point, complicatedly alienated from society at large and from society's official notion of what the Jewish community, as a proper subgroup of it, ought to be.

I suppose that Jewish intellectuals show a broad spectrum of associations and ambivalences toward their own identities. In their case, the ever-operating dialectic of identification and assimilation of the Jewish community at large is intensified and rendered more complex. The question is perhaps not so much of the degree of assimilation, but of the level at which it takes place. Individual differences of background and training are important here, as are the various ways in which individual writers and thinkers emerge from their early homes.

In my own case, for example, I learned what little Yiddish I know only the way my mother learned it, on the basis of previously learned German. My sense of "Jewish tradition" is bound to differ from that of my friends whose homes as children were Yiddish-speaking, whether or not their thinking

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lives have crystallized around a rejection or a cultivation of this background. Perhaps my sense of tradition, too, may seem superficially a bit factitious.

My own background is that of the parochial New York liberal with enlightened second-and-third-generation parents (*kashrut* continued up to the death of grandparents, Reconstructionism, private Hebrew teachers for my brother and myself) whose Judaism was intellectualized and somewhat self-conscious. My wife is only part Jewish and not "Talmudically" so. As an academic, I am part of a generation who might never have entered the formerly genteel, gentleman-scholarly field of literary studies were it not for the impingement upon it of urban intellectual life. Aside from some literary scholarship and criticism, my own writing has been primarily poetry. The situation of the contemporary Jewish novelist or literary journalist (in the best sense), vis-à-vis his identity, is different from that of a poet, I think. The former tends more to start out as a writer by confronting his identity in the most general way; and if his Jewishness does not come up somewhere in the course of this confrontation, we tend to suspect its authenticity. The poet's problems, in the past forty years in particular, concern themselves at the outset with language and form, style and rhetoric. His quest for his own "voice" aims toward two goals. The first of these, to be sure, is the discovery of himself. But the other is the discovery of the woof, as it were, of the English language and its traditions onto which the warp of the self is woven. That is why a writer like myself may appear to be slow in arriving at a topical treatment of Jewishness. Such a "discovery" can only come along with the poetic (as opposed to the pragmatic) "discovery" of such domains as the significance of one's sexuality, one's sense of the real, and, ultimately, of one's mortality.

ABOUT THE "values of Jewish tradition"—discussion of this often bogs down in persuasive definitions of what it really is. I identify it with modern *Galut* in its various phases (I should include here the recent intellectual tradition described in Question 2). The days of the Temple, prophetic ages, and even the rabbinic period remain myths of a golden age whose legacy of scripture must be read with a method of n-fold interpretation that makes the early Christian allegorizing of the Old Testament pale into relative literalism. Practically speaking, I see nothing in conventional affiliations with synagogue-stimulated Jewish culture that would bring me any closer to "tradition" or to enable me better to transmit it. If I ever decide to study Mishnah, I know where to do it. Worship I detest. Self-congratulation I distrust. In another age, my anti-clericalism would not preclude my affiliation with the synagogue. In America today, unfortunately, it does, and I have no personal disposition toward the modern neo-Orthodoxy itself modeled in good part upon developments in Protestantism.

About my daughter possibly converting—I view the prospect, along with other prospects, with some horror. In this, as in other cases, I shall not be consulted. I also view with milder horror my desire to manipulate her destiny. In this matter I feel that no *ad hoc* contrivance could work, and that if I am selfishly pleased with what happens to her, her sense of a complicated ambiguous Jewish identity will in the long run increase her capacities for knowledge and love.

About Israel—again, I have complicated feelings. On the one hand is the sense of the human necessity of a place for a rejected remnant to go. There is the kind of family joke aspect of the very idea of a Jewish *polis*. But I have also a mild distrust of any political entity currently founded on a notion of manifest destiny, theological or otherwise, and a real bewilderment at the level of *Realpolitik*. Pros and cons of colonialism, self-determinism, international justice, and the ultimate preservation of the planet (which is either a meaningless consideration or the most important one of all) are involved here in very confusing ways.

Henry James observed of all articulate Americans that our "complex fate" was to have constantly to struggle against our overevaluation of Europe. Just so must the Jewish intellectual wrestle with his tendency to shape himself to a role as Jew into which sympathetic European non-Jewish writers and thinkers have sought to cast him. But it is always hard to look into mirrors and decide which of one's attitudes and gestures are less authentic than others.

Perhaps it is finally to describe my posi-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion to say that I observe the complexity of the attitudes I have here expressed with great interest and some exhilaration.

[JOHN HOLLANDER, who teaches English at Yale, is the author of *A Crackling of Thorns,* which won the Yale Younger Poets Award in 1958, and the recently published critical study, *The Untuning of the Sky.* He is also *Partisan Review's* editorial associate for poetry, and a contributor to many periodicals.]

■ ■ ■

Judith Jarvis: Normally, I suppose, I haven't any attitude toward my own Jewishness, because normally I'm not aware of it. The question seems to me to be this: on what sorts of occasions is one made aware of it. I say "made aware of it" rather than "become aware of it" because for those of us whose parents were born in America, and whose homes were in no profound way touched by Jewishness—no more than a smattering of religious training, which it was clear to us, was not taken seriously at home, and a smattering of Yiddish tags and phrases, and certain kinds of food for Sunday breakfast and supper, and large family dinners with the relatives—for those of us, that is, whose parents had already rebelled against the Orthodox traditions before we were born, there is nothing in being Jewish which is present in us in daily life as a matter of course. A cue from outside is necessary to remind us of it. And for many quite obvious reasons, there are fewer jolts and shocks from outside than there were fifteen to twenty years ago.

But while the cues no longer come in the violent form they took then, no Jew living in a society as saturated with the forms and language of Christianity as America is can fail from time to time to be reminded of the fact that he is a Jew. One doesn't fear anti-Semitism, one doesn't in fact *fear* anything at all—but one is reminded: when political conventions are opened with a prayer, when one meets the expressions "Christian country" and "Jewish vote," when hymns are sung at the opening or closing of meetings whose purpose is totally non-religious. In fact, anything that smacks of religion at all will do the trick.

Of course no one intends anti-Semitism, nor do I take these reminders as anti-Semitic. The hymns are chosen with care, and no one could possibly take offense. Christmas is the (exhausting) season during which one goes to parties and gives and receives presents.

But the curious thing is that these things should remind us of being Jewish. I think the reason lies in just the sort of non-religious background I mentioned. One meets very few actively practicing Catholics in and around a large university; when a Catholic turns against his religion, he will hesitate before calling himself a Catholic in a way in which a non-believing Jew will not, and yet, however opposed he may now be to religious articles of faith in general, he can understand how it is that others may retain their faith. Perhaps there are several reasons for this, but at any rate one reason seems to be the fact that he was raised in his religion, and there was no ambiguity of attitude toward it in his home. The striking characteristic about *us,* on the other hand, is that we find it quite incredible that anyone should actively believe in a body of religious dogma. That our children should convert to another religion no more strikes us as a real possibility than that they should convert to Judaism itself. It fascinates us to think that there are those who believe, and we may even try to provoke such beliefs in ourselves, but in the end we cannot really imagine what it is like.

It would be absurd to call this "emancipation from superstition" on our part. Its source is probably a more subtle kind of fear, fear of the *possibility* of anti-Semitism, of the *possible* effects of adherence to dogma; after all, only the Jewish non-believer is so intimately affected by these marks of religious belief in others. But, as I said, I am aware of no such fear. And the only thing to which I can consciously trace this utter inability to understand the feelings of the true believer is the sense I had from my earliest years that belief was not demanded of me, that it was not even expected that I should or supposed that I would. Belief had no role to play. Judaism itself of course calls for very little active belief in dogma, and so the religious training (particularly my own Reform training) could not outweigh the casual attitude of my home.

One is, in America, very often reminded

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of religion, and of the existence of those for whom belief has a role to play, or at least of those for whom it appears to have a role to play. If I lived on a kibbutz, I should probably not think of myself as a Jew from one year to the next. It is because I am an American that I am aware of it. In just the same way as one finds oneself aware of being an American only while in Europe.

Israel, in fact, seems to play a rather curious role in this matter of being a Jew. In my image of it, there are four types of Israelis: first, the Orthodox Jew with a beard and black coat and broad-brimmed black hat; with him one feels an immediate sense of kinship. He's the only real Jew in Israel, and he isn't even an Israeli: one can find him in any large city in America. Then there are the shopkeepers and dentists. These are like our parents; they don't really belong in Israel, they just happen to live there. Third, there is the Oxford-educated diplomat; he isn't a Jew at all. And last, the fair-haired, Aryan-looking sabra (khaki shorts, open collar, he stands on a hilltop and gazes into the future)—he's a rather frightening figure. Lurid fantasy: the sabras having themselves a pogrom, and throwing the Jews out of Israel. No, now that there is no longer the kind of need for an Israel that there was some years ago, I no longer feel any commitment to or personal sympathy with it. (Though I do feel I've a stake in the comfort of those bearded Jews.)

PEOPLE SAY: so is there no content to being a Jew? Is it all defensive, negative? Well, perhaps there isn't much, but to say there isn't much isn't to say there isn't anything. "Jewish culture" isn't what does it; I suppose this expression stands for Talmudic study and the Yiddish storytellers, and these, as I said, we had only a nodding acquaintance with in childhood. The "value inherent in Jewish tradition"? Respect for the book, for books in general, let us say. But there are other traditions in which one finds this. And in fact, too much of it—that is, where it hinders direct looking at and listening to the world—can be a bad thing; it is perhaps *one* reason why, with just one major exception, and that a man who was excommunicated for his pains, there have been no important philosophers (as opposed to philosopher-theologians) in our tradition. Only in the present century is good philosophy being written by Jews. Nevertheless, respect for books is a part of our tradition. And add a conviction that social distinctions are fundamentally irrelevant. Add energy and patience and the capacity to survive—one is reminded of Plato's image of the just man crouched down under the wall, waiting for the storm to pass. And above all, an intense concern with moral issues. These things are worthy of respect; and a sense that one springs from this is part of the positive content of the belief that one is a Jew.

And together with this there are certain characteristics which we share—the sound of Yiddish moves us and we like certain kinds of food. We like a joke, and our humor has a distinctive wry irony. "Oh, if it's just *that* . . ." people often say, forgetting that what may be insignificant standing alone may figure importantly when conjoined with other things. Being a Jew is not having a religion, it is like having a nationality—Judaism is not international—and these, and others, are our national characteristics. They persist just as any set of national characteristics does; some of our foods, for example, everyone likes, but others only a Jew likes. Loves, in fact, and his children learn to do the same. Moreover, these things just by themselves constitute a tie with the past. So far as I can see, one need not make any special effort to transmit these characteristics, and the past history they are associated with, to one's children—so far as I can see, our children will be Jews in both these negative and positive senses no matter what we may think or do about it.

[JUDITH JARVIS is assistant professor of philosophy at Barnard College, and has contributed to *Mind*, the *Journal of Philosophy*, and other periodicals.]

■ ■ ■

Elihu Katz: (1) *The situation of the Jew.* Certainly the situation of the Jew has changed. Jews, nowadays, are more interested in Jewishness—and non-Jews are interested too. The relevant factors are widely agreed upon: apart from the openness of American social structure and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the doctrine of minority rights, the more immediate factors include (a) the reaffirmation of these rights in connection with the war effort; (b) the agony, and the guilt, of bearing witness to the destruction of European Jewry; (c) the redemptive joy in the triumphant emergence of Israel; (d) the rise of a third generation, unself-consciously American; (e) the cessation of Jewish immigration and, with it, Jewish visibility (imagined or real); (f) the decline of radical social movements (and Jewish participation therein) along with economic prosperity and ideological second thoughts; (g) the religious "revival" in America and the continued respectability of religious pluralism.

There has been a decided decline in self-hatred, I feel. All the indices show increased (if shallow) participation in Jewish affairs—though these center, more narrowly, in and around the synagogue. Ideologies of "defense" seem to be losing ground to a "that's their problem" attitude toward the American brand of anti-Semitism. In academia, Jews feel at least as much at home as anybody else, and I suspect that this is true, more or less, of most other pursuits (with the possible exception of big business). The intermarriage rate still seems intriguingly low and the mixed marriages that I know show a decided leaning toward Jewish identity and Jewish traditions. I believe that the leaning was in the other direction a generation ago.

(2) *Jewish values.* Ironically, the new "normalcy" which accounts for so much of the resurgence of Jewish identification acts to suppress the expression of Jewish values. In a sense, it's almost too *easy* to be a Jew. I am not so much concerned with theological or doctrinal values, though some of these (such as the refusal to personify God or reduce him to a lower level of abstraction; the insistence on the moral distinction between intention and action; the affirmation of this-worldliness; the negation of loving one's neighbor more than oneself) are certainly important. What concerns me more are the values that were forged out of the struggle for Jewish survival and ultimately, therefore, out of Jewish self-consciousness (or better, group-consciousness). It is the marginality, and yet the group-belongingness (voluntary or enforced), which explain values as diverse as "chosenness," non-conformism, scientific and artistic achievement, or cosmopolitanism. Taking an even larger giant step, it might be still more accurate to say that self-consciousness is responsible for the basic tension in Jewish values between universalism and particularism, between a concern for the world and a concern for the group.

THESE WERE THE values that were embodied in some of the Jewish institutions that were left behind in Europe and some of those that have declined in America (Yiddishism, Zionism, radical social movements). But the synagogue, into which most of Jewish life has retreated, cannot do very much with them. The synagogue in America stands for the local community, ethnic warmth, a smattering of Jewish learning, a sense of continuity, holidays and traditions, and occasional reaffirmations of where Judaism differs. But the synagogue also stands for Jewish *success.* America understands the synagogue. The rabbi on TV sounds very much like his non-Jewish colleague (and "decorum"—that campaign-slogan for Americanizing Jewish immigrants—has long since won out). By and large, this is wonderful. But it hardly seems the social context in which those Jewish values which emerged from unsuccess—and maybe even those which didn't—are likely to persist. The question is what will the Jews do with normalcy?

The same question holds good for Israel (Ben Gurion notwithstanding). Jewish values demand that Israel be different somehow. But how? The real goal of Zionism—even for Orthodox Israelis—means that "you no longer have to think about being Jewish."

Perhaps something new and valuable will emerge from this. But in the meantime, it is difficult to overlook the fact that the very basis of Jewish values—self-consciousness—is disappearing. Preservation of a historical sense may help. Or, it may be that the peculiar abnormality of Israeli and American Jews—that each has the other—may be a creative force making for "self-consciousness." Israel may remain "self-conscious" because of the American Jews in the audience, and American Jews may continue "self-conscious" because of Israel.

(3) *Jewish socialists and their relation to the Jewish community.* The universalism-particularism dilemma, I think, explains the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jewishness of the Jewishly-alienated radical intellectuals. I think there is a kind of classical resolution of this dilemma in Jewish thought: one can be concerned with the world without abandoning the group, and concerned with the group without abandoning the world, by being a kind of "pilot plant" for social and moral change. This is clear in the prophets, I think. It may explain the kibbutz in part. It may be a hope for Israel. But, obviously, it is easy enough to climb onto one or the other horn of the dilemma and dive off: there are particularistic Jews who reject the world, and universalistic Jews who reject the Jews. But these extremists may be more Jewish than those who have not experienced the dilemma at all.

(4) *Personal obligations.* I often feel the hand of Jewish history on my shoulder, and it is heavy, but it does not seem to push in any clear-cut direction. I sometimes have the snobbish feeling that other people have been moving toward *me* (though I am other-directed enough to be uncertain), but even if I am positively oriented toward my Jewishness, I have done very little about it.

On the whole, I think I led a very uncomplicated and warm American Jewish childhood and youth. I can remember only occasional surges of self-hatred, such as my decision to attend the more dignified Conservative service with the Gentile College Board proctor who was spending the Sabbath with us (so that he could administer the exam after sundown). The only outright anti-Semitic episode I can recall was some jeering in the barracks one day during basic training. My Jewishness and my Americanism were clearly compatible and were obviously the joint product of the second-generation, enlightened Orthodox home in which I was raised and the bilingual (English and Hebrew) religious day school which I attended through the eighth grade. I look back with amazement at the incredibly successful formula for American Jewish education that was worked out in our corner of Brooklyn. I am even more impressed to see how viable it still is.

As a child, and even through college, I considered myself religious and was rather strictly observant. Only later did I realize that my religiosity was the peculiar kind of Jewish ethnicity to which I still feel strongly and warmly committed. I do not now consider religious participation an important arena for personal commitment or action; and although I am aware that Jewish continuity is threatened every time religion and ethnicity are disconnected, I do not especially welcome the new theologizing in Judaism. Yet, I find pleasure and meaning in many traditional forms.

I do consider Jewish education a crucial arena. I do not much worry about the problem of "consistency" between the content of traditional Jewish education and the religious beliefs of the home—though it is a genuine concern, I suppose. (Our day school did very well with children from non-religious homes). I feel strongly about higher Jewish education—not for rabbis and professionals, but for laymen. I feel that Jewish imagery must be kept alive because this is the basis of Jewish creativity. I think Hebrew should be thoroughly taught. The word is still a paramount value in Judaism. But all this is very difficult to achieve.

Surely Israel will do better in these respects. I have seriously considered living permanently in Israel and still may decide to do so. The trouble with Israel is that it is such a big idea in the perspective of world history and such a little idea in the perspective of modern history. That the Jews survived as a more or less unified people, that the "longing for Zion" could have been kept alive, that a Jewish state could arise out of the embers—these are big ideas. That the Hebrew University should speak a language that only a few million people understand, that careers in the arts and sciences should be limited by ethnically determined geographical boundaries, that ordinary old nationalism should preoccupy the Jews—these are little ideas. Only some uniquely Jewish product can justify this ultimately.

I feel strongly about remembering the Nazis. I do not see how to do this without institutionalizing personal and communal rituals of remembrance. I try to avoid social contacts with Germans for this reason. As a social scientist, I feel that my profession has sorely neglected the opportunity to analyze what happened in Germany and how it all was possible. But, again, I have done nothing about this myself.

[ELIHU KATZ is associate professor of sociology at the University of Chicago and the author (with Paul Lazarsfeld) of *Personal Influence*.]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joseph Kraft: Community is for me the touchstone of Jewishness. Raised without religious training of any kind in a home that observed even holidays only casually, I find myself indifferent to the faith of my fathers. Neither does the history of the Jews as a people invoke keen interest. But at all times I have been fascinated by the story of Joseph in Egypt; and equally by its modern counterparts: Disraeli in Britain, Trotsky in Russia, Judah Benjamin in the South.

That is to say that I have a Jewish consciousness not imbued with religion or tradition. It derives instead from the circumstances of being raised in a certain New York neighborhood, of going to a certain school, and to certain summer camps. Not only were almost all the people in these places Jews, but everyone I knew as a boy frequented the same, or like, places. Among these families there was a rough similarity of income and occupation. We listened to the same radio programs, played the same games, ate the same food, wore the same clothes, lived in the same kind of apartments, and knew the same people. Even with chance acquaintances we could never play "Do You Know" beyond a round or two without scoring a hit. We were as tight-knit as a testudo—and perhaps, ultimately, for the same reason: to hold a shield against the outside world. We constituted in short a community—a Jewish community.

I like to think—but cannot prove—that a special spirit animated the members of that community. Though removed from the presence, and remote from the doctrine, of the socialist intellectuals, we felt their impact in an instinct for doing good and a constructive approach to problems. We valued money, comfort, health, status, and pleasure; but also work, books, education, settlement houses, art, and the New Deal. We were the opposite of what I understand by the word "Beat": we cared.

BY COMPARISON WITH, not only our parents, but even our expectations, we have doubtless improved our lot over the past fifteen years. We are, I would say, happier. We make more money, hold better jobs, live in more attractive homes. We have certainly a wider, and probably a deeper, range of human contacts. These have carried us much further into the outside world of Gentile society, which has proved to be far less hostile than most of us must have foreseen. The "Jewish Problem," if it has not ceased to exist for us, has been much softened.

Much of the credit for its easing goes to the State of Israel. Its existence has raised what used to be an invidious, miasmic social question to the plane of international conflict—that is of open discussion. Besides, because so much of Israel's background and justification lie in the Nazi era, its success represents a triumph over malignancy that gives confidence and strength. I do not like to think of myself as a "narrow nationalist"; I have lived in Moslem lands and count Arabs "among my best friends"; Nasserism seems to me a step forward in the Middle East. Still, at the time of the Sinai campaign I felt a distinct physical élan: a sense of victory.

Even Israel, however, cannot save us. As a group we lack inner economic balance, and could be crushed in a new time of troubles. As individuals—and it is our great weakness—we have built no resource against failure. I hope to pass on to my children the instinct for caring: the spirit of constructive achievement. I know that the community which was my Jewish inheritance cannot be passed on: the testudo has broken up, and I myself have strayed from the fold. But beyond that I am not clear.

[JOSEPH KRAFT, who has worked on the New York *Times* and the Washington *Post*, and is at present a free-lance political journalist, won the 1959 Overseas Press Club Award for the best magazine reporting on foreign affairs. He is at work on a book about the Algerian war.]

■ ■ ■

Robert Langbaum: I think that the situation of the American Jew has changed radically since World War II and that the change has most affected my generation, the generation that fought the war and is now in the neighborhood of forty. Those much older, who were established in their careers when the war started, cannot be as aware as we are of how much things have changed. Those much younger would not remember how things were before the war and would therefore be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

less aware than we that the present situation is a change. The change I have in mind is the opening to Jews of so many vocations, and consequently of so many social milieus, that were once considered closed to them. The change means that Jews, like other Americans, are better off materially than they were before the war. But more important is the psychological result of the change—the fact that young Jews now *expect* all doors to be open to them.

Before the war, Jews were always talking about how this and that field was closed to them, and young Jews did not aspire in those directions. There are still, of course, plenty of jobs for which Jews are at a competitive disadvantage, and young Jews are perfectly aware of this. Yet it is years since I have heard anyone renounce a profession because there is no chance in it for a Jew. Jews talk very little these days about closed fields, and young Jews are less inclined than their fathers would have been to blame it on discrimination when they do not get a job or a promotion. My impression is, however, that young Jews react more indignantly to cases of real discrimination than did their fathers for whom such things were accepted as a condition of life. In other words, Jews have since the war come closer to really feeling like first-class citizens. My generation is in the peculiar position of having been, both as Jews and children of the depression, prepared for a harder future than actually materialized. No wonder they are well-disposed toward society. The dissident Beats are on the whole younger; most of them do not remember the depression and did not fight in the war.

The change is most apparent in the universities, where the large number of Jewish students has pretty much put an end to the old talk about quotas. Before the war, the Jewish university professor, especially in the humanities and most especially in English, was rare enough to be worth exhibiting. Now the steadily increasing number of Jewish professors is no longer even a subject for favorable comment. Jews have profited from the momentous opening up of American life since the war, the main cause of which has been the expansion of our economy with the consequent demand for more manpower. In the case of the universities, the same expansion which has made room for Jews has also made room for creative writers, practicing critics, for *intellectuals,* who are not necessarily the same thing as professors and for whom there was little place in the universities before the war. Since it makes a big difference to the attitudes of intellectuals whether they carry on inside or outside the "establishment," the intellectual tone of our time—the tone of affirmation and responsibility, of "conformity" as the hostile critics say—is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that most intellectuals are in the universities (some even, in the new Kennedy Era, are to be in the highest circles of government). Jewish intellectuals, therefore, now find themselves on two counts, both as Jews and intellectuals, on the inside track where they would probably have been outside before the war.

THE EFFECT ON THEIR Jewishness is to make them think less about it. Not that they renounce it. There are fewer definite renunciations than before the war. There is, if anything, more observance of Jewish rituals —especially among college students, who are no longer embarrassed, as they used to be when I went to college, about being Jewish. Judaism, as a thing to be accepted or rejected, is less of an issue in our lives. For it looks less like the position of an embattled minority, saying no to the rest of society, and more, as it loses its connections with Yiddish culture, like one of those liberal Protestant denominations to which so many Americans loosely belong.

It can be said that American Jews are simply assimilating as the Jews did in Western Europe fifty years ago, but there is, I think, a difference in that Jews here are following a general American movement peculiar to our time. You have only to teach the older literature to realize how few students seem to know any more what, according to their religious affiliations, they are supposed to believe, that all in fact subscribe to the same secular, democratic, humanitarian faith—belief in a more or less impersonal deity and in tolerance, good will, peace, progress, and social justice. The truth is that American Jews are not so much going Protestant as that all Americans, including Protestants, are shedding divisive traditional identities in favor of a new American amalgam.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What then is the remaining influence of one's Jewishness? This is like asking who you really are. To answer such a question requires more self-understanding than most of us have. One has one's identity on so many different levels of consciousness. Many Jews reject Judaism and then express it through a secular equivalent. This explains, I think, the attraction Marxism used to have for Jews, who rejected one morally strenuous, no-saying minority to join another. I am reminded of an evening I spent not long ago with some Jewish intellectuals of the generation older than mine, the generation that came to maturity in the 30's. They were ex-Marxists, and I was struck by the assumption behind all of their talk that it was in the nature of things for the majority to be always wrong and that only their circle could be expected to be right. They made me think of my Orthodox grandfather, for their mentality was not only still Marxist, it was also still Jewish in the old, no-saying sense. Jewish intellectuals of my generation associate themselves instead with what is right and wrong in the world around them.

NOWADAYS FREUD has the special appeal for Jews that Marx used to have. Since both men were concerned with redemption but with redemption in this world, their moral quality is Jewish. Freudianism, however, is the more appropriate secular expression for Jews who no longer feel outside society, for it is not revolutionary—it turns our attention to the deficiencies not of others but of ourselves. I find myself drawn—and I have the impression that this may be true of many other Jewish students of the humanities—to monistic philosophies, to writers like Blake and Browning who deny the dualism of body and soul and speak for the intensification of this life. They appeal, I am sure, to something deeply Jewish in me. Jews, I observe, take life more seriously than other people do; hence their unusual exertions to make a success of it, whether in getting money or learning. Even those Jews who think they have rejected Judaism carry it on through their attraction to the Hebraic elements in Western culture.

But we are attracted, it can be argued, because of the moral capital of our Orthodox grandfathers which will soon run out. True. If Jewish energies are to continue extraordinary even in their secular expression, they must be fed by some source of vitality in organized Judaism. Unfortunately, I see little promise of such vitality in the organized Judaism of America, which for all its admirable bustle is remarkably uncreative as compared, say, to the secular creativity of American Jews. Israel is the only place, I think, where Judaism stands a chance of again being creative as Judaism. On that chance alone Israel is important to Jews and the rest of the world.

In my own case, I expect to give my daughter as much Hebrew education as possible because I believe one ought to know one's past. I do not seriously envisage her conversion to another religion, but see it as a distinct possibility that she might marry a non-Jew with as loose a religious affiliation as hers. This would be disturbing, but it is rather a shock for me to realize that it would disturb our way of life less than if she were to marry the kind of Orthodox young Jew who would enter our house with hat, beard, and disapproving look, and could not even sit down to dinner with us.

[ROBERT LANGBAUM is associate professor of English at the University of Virginia and the author of *The Poetry of Experience*. He is now at work on a book-length study of Isak Dinesen.]

■ ■ ■

Robert J. Lifton: Thinking about what it means to be a Jew in America from the vantage point of Tokyo does not give me a feeling of detachment. Rather, I am struck by the universality of what we sometimes think of as a peculiarly Jewish paradox: the focus upon one's specific historical identity sets one apart in some degree from all who do not share it; yet one requires some such focus, at least inwardly, in order to feel connected to mankind. In life, as in art, the particular is one's only connection with the universal. This applies even in relationship to barbarism: the Nazi atrocities were both a specifically Jewish and a broadly human tragedy.

I look upon the complex of emotional influences which comprise my Jewishness as a loosely defined but strongly felt style of existence, whose significance lies primarily

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in the way in which it permits me to be related to humanity. And I am convinced that the Jew in America need not posit the senseless alternatives of either tribal exclusiveness or disembodied "melting" into a hypothetical Anglo-Saxon community.

Members of my generation—now in our mid-thirties—can perceive from personal experience something of the changing relationship of three generations of Jews to American life: European grandparents with a limited penetration of American life, grateful for the refuge offered by American liberality, yet viewing this same cultural liberality as a profound threat to the purity of Jewish identity in themselves and their offspring; American-born parents who rebelled, quietly or fiercely, from what seemed to them a closed system of Jewish thought and ritual, carrying their Jewish heritage in their bones as they made their heroic forays into an inviting, discriminating, ultimately (at whatever psychological cost) liberating American society; and ourselves, nursed as much upon the American liberal dream as upon the special struggles of the Jew within it, finding that as adults we are more consciously connected to American life than to Judaism, sometimes longing for elements of what seems to be a denied Jewish heritage, yet knowing that we move, inevitably, toward a new psychological and cultural synthesis.

I suspect that many of us treasure the special identity of the cultural outsider which the Jew still carries within himself in America, an identity of profound creative value, but not without its dangers. Its value lies in the courage it may provide to express oneself in opposition to prevailing thought and to reach beyond cultural prejudices—the two elements of "inner identity" which Freud attributed to his Jewish heritage (but which, one must add, are possessed by the true intellectual of any heritage). The danger lies in the cultural outsider's powerful urge to divest himself of this painful identity and become the arch-insider—a yearning that can be pursued, literally with a vengeance, as perhaps in the case of those cultural outsiders of various backgrounds who direct their energies more toward the build-up of American military power than toward the preservation of all human life. Yet these generations of Jews who have faced the problems of the cultural oustider have been very American after all, following the American pattern of the dramatic break with one's past (often to the extent of a myth of total severance) which later creates a nostalgia for "the past" so profound that I suspect it has much to do with America's peculiar present predicament of being a "post-modern" nation which has great difficulty in finding a vision for the future.

NEVERTHELESS, I FEEL that individual bearers of Jewish culture and character have had a profound effect upon American life. Let me mention just one form of influence, which is perhaps the most basic. I find myself grouping together the Jewish comedian, the Jewish writer, and yes, the Jewish psychoanalyst—an influential trio because they have contributed something powerful which America seemed ready to accept. What these three possess in common, I believe, is a special concern for basic human emotions, and for the relationship between emotions and ideas. All three are impelled toward, even obsessed with, the discovery and the expression of those passions which lie hidden beneath the protective coating of pretense, subterfuge, and "logic." And all three use techniques of interpretive probing, teasing, and gentle (or not so gentle) irony—attitudes derived from a historical experience sufficiently varied and bitter to make Jews aware of the elemental forces in man and suspicious of claims to heroism. At its best, this "Jewish style" blends emotional wisdom, critical acceptance of human foibles, and a noble humanistic effort to get to the truth about people. At less than its best, it can degenerate (in comedian and audience, writer and reader, psychoanalyst and patient) into shallow sentimentalism or cultish psychologizing, both of which flatten out human energies by molding them into conventionalized, comfortable forms. And there is the additional danger lest this attraction to basic emotions become attached to excessive intellectual claims in a pattern of messianic extremism, or ideological totalism. Fortunately, the "Jewish style" very often possesses specific antidotes for such totalism: a mocking humor, and a genuine use of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intellect—a passion for ideas in which the entire being opens itself to the world.

I find it very difficult, however, to separate fully the Jewish from the American elements in my personal identity. I have been deeply, although not uncritically, inspired by the hard brilliance and personal courage of Sigmund Freud; yet in my automatic human judgments I think I have been equally influenced by currents initiated by Thomas Jefferson and William James. And for a moral and philosophical viewpoint that makes sense to me in the contemporary world I turn neither to a Jew nor to an American, but rather to Albert Camus.

When I visited the State of Israel five years ago I felt profoundly involved with people I met, and moved by what I encountered; the experience called forth simultaneously a greater awareness of both my Jewish and American identities, as I tried to distinguish to my own satisfaction the similarities and the differences between myself and those Jewish intellectuals who had become Israelis. My sense of involvement with Israel makes me all the more concerned that it overcome its remnants of cultural fundamentalism—a concern shared by many Israeli intellectuals, and a requirement which I would make of America and of all other countries as well.

As people throughout the world move, willingly or not, toward greater personal exchange, one's relationship to his own heritage cannot help but be altered. For me it becomes increasingly essential to be able to draw deeply upon Jewish, American, and broadly human roots in order to roam freely in intellectual and moral quests, to be more concerned with universal values than with any specific ritual. A conversion to a different religion by one of my children might sadden me, or trouble me in ways that I do not know, but not nearly so much as would a failure—in them or in me—to live up to this wider ideal.

[Robert Lifton, M.D., is research associate in psychiatry and associate in East Asian studies at Harvard. At present he is in Japan making a study of psychological patterns of Japanese youth. His book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism,* was published by Norton earlier this year.]

Michael Maccoby: Although I am not a believer and only the promise of a particularly beautiful service would move me to a synagogue, I feel firmly planted in the Jewish tradition, and I recognize in myself, despite the ravages of a suburban and Ivy League education, the mysterious Jewish *Weltanschauung*. It seems to me that two instincts continually war within this tradition, and they play themselves out wherever the Jew may be, even in the United States today. The nobler of these instincts preaches a transcendence of incestuous and nationalistic bonds. Without blind optimism, rather permeated by tragic understanding, it believes in the possibility that man by his own efforts can perfect himself and the world. It is this spirit, with its roots in prophetic messianism, which best describes the great Jews of the past century: Marx, Einstein, and, paradoxically, Freud who argued a skepticism of the Jew's "presumptuous attempts to conquer the outer world of appearances by the inner world of wishful thinking." Such presumption also characterized Jewish intellectuals in America when labor was beginning to organize and during the 30's, when many were associated with radical but humanistic movements in politics and the arts, and with psychoanalysis which, having not yet lost its revolutionary beginnings, was still exploring the sources of man's unrest and fighting the remaining resistances of Victorian prejudice.

There are still notable Jews who fit this heroic mold, but by and large the scene has changed, and today when I consider American Jews as an intellectual group, I feel the loss of the radical spirit and the dominance of the opposing tendency in Judaism, the instinct toward narcissism and exclusiveness. Of those Jews who speak out on contemporary political questions, there are many who claim to be convinced conservatives or superpatriots. More often, the Jew today lacks any political coloring but that of lobbyist for Israel, or he may be an "expert" who leaves political decision-making to others, but implicitly supports some of our society's worst traits. Such are many of the weapons experts and some psychoanalysts, now fat and successful high priests of adjustment.

In judging the Jewish community, it is important to remember that the turnabout from radicalism was a mass movement of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American intellectuals, a result of many factors including an awakening to the realities of Communist totalitarianism, the dampening spirit of the cold war, and the wounds of the McCarthy era. The latter placed a stamp of political danger on radical thought and also turned the attention of sincere patriots toward *resisting* any and all ideological encroachment on political liberty. The result was that few took up the task of distilling a new, positive ideology from the old mixture, tainted by totalitarianism. In the pressure of these struggles, many intellectuals withdrew totally from politics and sought to fulfill their social instincts in fields such as mental health, city planning, and education, which were not yet in the political spotlight. In themselves, such efforts were constructive for the society, but the danger was that the withdrawal of radical spirit from the larger arena would be rationalized by a potentially destructive ideology based on the pessimistic theology of men like Reinhold Niebuhr and buttressed by the skeptical trend in psychoanalysis. The "New Sanity," as it might be called, was an attack on worldly utopia as either sinful or illusory, and it carefully marked out sanity as a narrow path between various form of madness, while the road to a more evolved and rational society was left to the weeds.

PERHAPS THE JEW was more susceptible to the logic of the new sanity than most. The events in his recent history tended to make him particularly careful lest he in any way seem disruptive or disloyal to a nation entering the cold war, and many Jews in whom radicalism slept fitfully could not suppress a feeling of relief that there existed a Roy Cohn to counterbalance the Rosenbergs. Of the particular Jewish circumstances creating a mood of caution, the first was the trauma of the Nazi era which reawakened the thought in the Jewish unconscious that no matter how much he seemed at home, the Jew was potentially an alien in any stranger's house.

Related to this shock and the innumerable tragedies borne by Jews, was the creation of Israel and the conflicts it produced in every thinking Jew. On the one hand, it became a deserved homeland for the suffering and a source of pride for all Jews who needed the proof that they could be fighters and farmers. On the other hand, the American Jew cannot blot out the unpleasant facts about Israel: that it is a bellicose and nationalistic country which has immorally treated its Arab population and which, although supported mainly by Americans, has interests which are often contrary to those of the United States. Recently, as Israel tries to build an atomic bomb and Ben Gurion hysterically demands the complete loyalty of all American Jews, the conflict has become even more intense. And caught in the position of supporting Israel for humane as well as narcissistic reasons, the Jew is somewhat in the position of the white Southerner who, while suppressing the implications to true patriotism of his immediate moral dilemma, is tempted to prove his American loyalty by an intransigent cold war stance and by adopting the conservatism and flag-waving which the mob often mistakes for patriotism. (I would like to think that the great majority of Jews who voted for Kennedy were voting for the New Frontier rather than for the Democratic party's pro-Israel record. But there is no question that Jewish influence is greater in the Democratic party, as the choice of cabinet members and the quick blackballing of Senator Fulbright for the position of Secretary of State testify.)

The question of the State of Israel is a particularly crucial problem, for as long as the American Jew refuses to accept consciously the questions it poses, he will probably remain uncommitted to the great issues of the day. And it is just these new frontiers which in America most demand the Jew's optimistic faith spiced with tragic knowledge—necessary to offset America's loss of the simple belief that history would continue to reward like a mother who expects nothing in return, rather than like a father who demands constant proofs of achievement.

Today, when a Jew calculates how many casualties may be profitably sustained, given so many bomb shelters, or when a Jew concentrates on adjusting his patients to a corrupt system, the Jewish essence is being repressed. And what is the pure Jewish essence? As Freud wrote: "It was only to my Jewish nature that I owed the two qualities that have become indispensable to me throughout my difficult life. Because I was a Jew I found myself free of many of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the prejudices which restrict others in the use of the intellect: as a Jew I was prepared to be in the opposition and to renounce agreement with the compact majority." Although Freud would not have claimed it, there is also within the Jew the ancient belief in the power of the word and in the necessity of man's continually remaking himself, and in the painful process creating a more loving and beautiful community.

[MICHAEL MACCOBY has taught in the social sciences both at Harvard and the University of Chicago, and has contributed to a variety of periodicals. Currently he is in Mexico, engaged in a special research project with Erich Fromm.]

■ ■ ■

Wallace Markfield: On Fridays, an hour or so before sundown, The Collector would limp into my mother's kitchen and take what there was to take from the *pushkeh*. Wasted, gloomy-eyed, wearing the thinnest of coats and unlaced sneakers in all weathers, he might have been lifted, kicking and nagging, from the pages of a Malamud story. He would stack the coins—pennies, nickels, once in a while a dime, quarters never—sweep them into a shopping bag, and, then, with the remnant of a pencil scratch out his meager receipt: *From Markfield, a Contribution*. Thereupon he would sway and sigh and drop a few heavy hints about hard times. How the boys in the yeshiva lived on day-old bread and the cheapest of meats, how egg crates served them as study tables, how they could not afford, *nebach,* to replace a light bulb. Before he was gone my mother would promise to do better, far better in the weeks to come, while I, deft pilferer of the *pushkeh* pennies, would swallow down a bitter lump of guilt.

Though he is dead probably these twenty years, I nevertheless expect The Collector, like Bardamu's Robinson, to pop up in my life again. I see, with appalling clarity, a fund-raising affair, the kick-off dinner, say, of the National Council for the Comfort of Jewish Lonely (NCCJL). The waiters have cleared the tables, the pledge cards are in place, and all eyes turn upon the dais. Nervously rasping, the chairman fiddles with his notes, gives a few healthy bangs with the gavel. "Order, please, ladies and gentlemen, a little bit of order!" He is met by the scrape of chairs, the chime of glassware. But soon the hullabaloo dwindles into a reverent hush. "Distinguished guests," says the chairman, as the photographer hoists his strobe unit, "distinguished guests and fellow officers—" When all of a sudden The Collector, his hour come round at last, shlumps on floppy sneakers across the vast expanse of ballroom, drawing slowly near the dais, his pencil poised, his shopping bag open . . .

Admittedly, I am a special case. From my cubicle in the publicity mill of one of the medium-sized Jewish philanthropic agencies I see the American Jew and the American Jewish community as a fish might see the world from his tank—clouded, freakish, sometimes smaller, sometimes larger than life. In my time I have catered to and cajoled a thousand big givers, filled them with compassion and passion, brought to their eyes tears enough to irrigate the Negev. I have raised up images of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, of sun-bronzed sabras gallantly picking oranges under sniper fire, of forlorn Jewish aged wasting their golden years on park benches, of scapegoats and pariahs, of the broken families and chronically ill seeking help in time of need. Who can say, at this point, if I have chronicled these agonies or created them? And that golden-ager on that park bench—where have I seen him before? No matter; as one publicity director pointed out in a masterful memo on the use of stock photos:

"Many illustrations may be used for more than one field of service. For example, a change of words in the caption and heading can transform a community center illustration into a child care photo: a care of the aged picture may be used equally well to depict vocational rehabilitation, etc., etc."

Once each week I scan scores of Anglo-Jewish newspapers. From year to year and community to community the lead stories seem to issue from one mind and one mimeograph machine. There is the crisis ("Morocco Revokes Exit Visas; No Aid to Emigration of Jews"); the remembrance of things past ("Twenty Years Ago: Maimonides Hospital Opens Out-Patient Wing"); the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

celebration of the present ("Combined Jewish Appeal Pledges Top $750,000 Mark"); the anxious peek toward the future ("Jewish Culture Taking Back Seat, Study Group Charges"); the invocation of the name ("Feldman Takes PPJS Helm for Second Term"). A blurred four-column cut dominates the bottom of the page; President Kennedy is recieving a laminated, illuminated scroll from the Daughters of Israel.

The inside pages are made of warmer, more intimate and *heimishe* stuff: S. Lawrence Layman's trip to Israel, the Temple Sisterhood bazaar, the Junior Hadassah production of *The Wall,* the recent Center lecture by Maurice Samuel on "Jewish Types and Stereotypes in the American Novel." Next I cast a cold eye upon the editorials, passing, without a tremor in transition, from the solemn, Max Lerner-type moralizing (". . . somehow we are *all* responsible"), to the orotund optimism of Benet-*cum*-Macleish-*cum*-Corwin ("out of the ashes of the crematoria there rises a phoenix in Israel"), to the catchy parallelism-into-half-truth style of the Luceman ("In an age of anxiety, a time for greatness") and thence to the somber sociological speculation ("Is not our status-seeking and object-hunger drawing us farther and farther from the faith of our forebears?").

IT IS THE social news that holds me longest, the chit-chat about births and brides and Bar Mitzvahs. How I envy Andrew William, Edwin Bruce, Don Craig, and Michael Adam as they pose in *talleisim* and bow ties! No *rebbe* cracked their knuckles or meted out arid stretches of *chumash* to memorize, no bearded, brooding, vindictive Jehovah fevered their dreams. Percival Goodman designed their Sunday schools, John Dewey laid out the rules for their instructors, and that Old Testament God has long since grown affable and even-minded; his beard is gone and he now resembles Norman Vincent Peale. And soon, all too soon, Andrew William will be paired off with Linda Jane, Edwin Bruce with Susan Lynn, Don Craig with Sandra Lee, and Michael Adam—somehow I wouldn't be surprised if Michael Adam marries a *shikse.*

The mothers and fathers bother me, though. I linger and linger over the smooth, bland, untroubled faces that preside over installations and elections, Sisterhoods and Brotherhoods, fashion shows and theater parties. Something, something is amiss in these faces, but what and why? For in six thousand years has there ever been so large, so powerful and prosperous a Jewish community? What needs are there yet to meet, what agencies remain to be created? What tension, what anxiety lies beyond the surveys and statistics of the social worker and human relations expert. . . ?

Meanwhile, my old Collector has reached the dais. He is lifting a hand and pointing a prophetic finger at those who sit on boards and those who sit on committees, at those who give and those who get others to give. He has come to tell them all one thing, and one thing only: *Es vell dir gornisht helfen.*

[WALLACE MARKFIELD, whose stories and reviews have been widely published, is now at work on a novel of New York intellectual life.]

■ ■ ■

Hugh Nissenson: I've been thinking about that scandal in Scarsdale; the case of the Episcopal convert who was refused admittance to a country club dance because his father is Jewish. Yesterday I had a long talk with L. about it. Brought up as an Episcopalian himself, but now an agnostic who is fond of quoting Camus's "I want to know if I can live with what I know and only with that" as an article of his faith, he was frankly appalled at my reaction to the whole business: that barely repressed satisfaction that one somehow derives from having his worst expectations fulfilled.

"I just can't get over it," he tells me. "You sound like a racist yourself."

"Why?"

"Because they're saying that a Jew remains a Jew no matter what, and you seem to agree. You're agreeing with the tacit assumption that being a Jew isn't just a matter of religious conviction."

"That's not what I said at all."

"It's what you implied. What else can I think? . . . Take yourself. You consider yourself a Jew—more—a Jewish writer. What

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

does that mean? You can't tell me that you're religious."

"I'm not observant—no."

"Then you're no more of a Jew than I am a Christian."

"Maybe so, but the fact remains that you can deny it without humiliation, whereas I can't."

"Shades of Sartre . . . all you're saying is that you are what you are because it's what people think you are."

"Partly, and I admit that's humiliating too, but who isn't? . . . never mind. I don't know. Maybe you ought to speak with my father."

"Why?"

"He would agree with you. He says that one can't be a Jew without God."

"Of course. It's just a question of religion."

"No."

"Then what?"

"Well, maybe you're right . . . at least I sometimes think that it presupposes a certain relationship to the idea of God."

"I don't understand."

"Well, without what I would call—how can I say it?—a kind of spiritual obsession with the idea, being a Jew is simply a condition and nothing more. . . ."

"I still don't get it."

BUT I LET IT GO at that. In all the years that we've been good friends, it is this which has always divided us. The same age, with much the same background and education, political affiliations and intellectual interests, it would be only fair to say that we have both found that American society offers us practically the same opportunities. All in all, I suppose it's this very unprecedented freedom of choice that constitutes the real change in the situation of the American Jew in the last fifteen years. The generation that has matured since the end of the Second World War has found it possible as never before to identify itself completely with the secular, pluralistic culture that surrounds us, and we've done so, gladly. Admit it or not, what L. resents is our attempt to try and maintain separate identities as Jews. In a certain way, he is justified. To be honest, it would be hard to say just how much of this self-assertion is an expression of hostility against the Gentile, for it is the mass murder of European Jewry, regardless of the degree of assimilation that it may have attained, that determines our attitude toward the problem of Jewish identity as much as that of surviving Jews anywhere.

"We were condemned to hang one another," says a former inmate of Auschwitz. It is the anticipation of such complicity with an evil that obviates the innocence of the victim that secretly anguishes us all. Given the same, or similar circumstances happening again, who can say that he could not be forced into becoming an accomplice?

The Israeli, perhaps; hence our obsession with the Jew armed; blond and blue-eyed, or so we like to believe, with a rifle over his shoulder, invested by our humiliation with some of the attributes of our tormentors. Is he a Jew at all? Malraux answers that ". . . a retreat from God was necessary before the hero would at last confront religion so that the indomitable submission of Jewry could come to an end." Curiously enough, we are convinced that such a confrontation is characteristically Jewish insofar as it is the result of an outraged sense of justice. Who can say who is to be more revered than Abraham or Job or Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev who would have brought the Almighty Himself to trial for what He had done to the Jews? If now, as in all throughout our history, we cannot be reconciled to Him, what is inescapable is that even when we renounce Him we do so in His Name.

I suppose this perpetual crisis of faith is really what I meant when I spoke with L. about the spiritual obsession of the Jew. In this light, observant or not, at least I am able to comprehend the source of the religious tradition that requires a man to repeat his *berachot* over all the acts of his life: whether he studies, eats, goes to the john, smells a flower, makes love, or stands at an open grave. It is an attempt to sanctify, actively affirm the totality of this world, deriving from a belief that fundamentally denies a dualistic origin of evil, or the dichotomy of spirit and matter, the religious and secular life; a belief that ultimately must dare to suggest that we must worship God with the evil impulse itself.

Right now, of course, it can be argued that the real crisis of faith is that there is no crisis at all; that the very absence of any such preoccupation in the modern Jew explains

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

why so many of our contemporary writers feel drawn toward a recreation of the past, or a strangely arid objectification of a present that lends itself to satirization best of all. It may very well be. But when was it different? The greatness of our literature from the Bible to Isaac Bashevis Singer and Jacob Presser is that it is eminently "realistic" and "symbolic," "immediate" and "transcendent" at the same time—or rather tries to be. The almost intolerable tension which results is what specifically characterizes it as Jewish, and ultimately, now as always, it is the individual writer himself who must assume the burden of this expression regardless of the relative "situation" or even the concern of his audience.

[HUGH NISSENSON has published stories in *Harper's* and COMMENTARY. He has just left for Israel, where he will be reporting on the Eichmann trial.]

■ ■ ■

Ned Polsky: Unless one defines a Jew in strictly racist terms—i.e., as anyone born of Jewish parents—I am not a Jew, and since childhood have not thought of myself as such. As some answers below may make clear, the truth of this has seldom struck me so fully as when I looked over your questionnaire, whose assumptions are remote from mine.

(1) The situation of the Jew in America has indeed changed, for the better. Anti-Semitism still exists in both economic and "social" forms, usually together, but in general there has been a continued economic rise of American Jewry accompanied increasingly by social acceptance. In the two institutional areas best known to me, book publishing and college teaching, anti-Semitism has radically declined. There has even been one breach made in that most cherished and long-standing "gentleman's agreement" of American intellectual life—the agreement among Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, since their beginnings, that no Jew should ever receive a *permanent* appointment in English.

This changed situation hasn't influenced my "attitude toward [my] own Jewishness" simply because I feel no "Jewishness" in either a religious or cultural sense (see below). Things might be different if people passed judgment on me as "Jewish"; but not since I was nine years old or thereabouts, when I was attacked as a "mockey" by an Irish street gang, have I to my knowledge been personally subjected to either anti-Semitic or pro-Semitic discrimination. And American anti-Semitism as a whole seems to me a relatively piddling affair; no Jew has suffered in America a ten-thousandth of what any Negro suffers from discrimination, and I think that everyone concerned to combat discrimination should apportion his energies accordingly.

(2) A political autobiography is in order: In 1944, aged fifteen, I was a Stalinoid liberal of the *PM* variety. The next year, at the University of Wisconsin, I fell in with older radicals held together chiefly by anti-Stalinism: Cannonites, Shachtmanites, Socialist party members, and "critical supporters" of all sorts. They set me reading a weird mixture of Marx and the Moscow Trial reports, radical papers and internal bulletins, back issues of *Partisan Review,* heavy doses of Trotsky, and Dwight Macdonald's *Politics.* I fellow-traveled briefly with the Shachtmanites and then became a libertarian socialist, which I still am. Of Americans who were then writing on politics, by far the most impressive to me was Dwight Macdonald.

I recognized that most of the radicals around me were of Jewish origin, and the historical reasons for this, but never thought much about it, nor about the fact that the contemporary writer and the college teacher who politically influenced me most were not Jews. It seemed beside the point, and still does.

Nor do I think your term "socialist" fully comprehends them. Their commitments then were mainly to revolutionary Communism—albeit in Trotskyist or attenuated "independent" forms—and they came to democratic socialism, if at all, rather late. They are perhaps best reflected in the *Partisan Review* of 1937–43. Many have followed *PR*'s turnings since then, and have abandoned politics altogether or at best incline a rare and ritualistic nod to socialism; none even pretends that the magazine is today seriously "partisan." In the decade 1947–57 (roughly), a good number sunk to red-baiting as a way of life and embraced the *New Leader* or *National Review,* or tried

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to make up with their parents and become "good Jews" by writing neo-religious essays for COMMENTARY; or tried for a hole-in-one by writing red-baiting essays for COMMENTARY. But some others, in a sense picking up where Macdonald left off, turned from *PR*'s orbit to found *Dissent* and work out a new radical critique of the times; I fully subscribe to their goals.

(3) (A) No.

(B) Like some other minority groups, Jews have contributed to American tastes in food and in humor; otherwise I see not much influence of Jewish culture in the broad sense. Jewish influence on American "high culture" is more complicated: Jews have not made original contributions disproportionate to their numbers (as the major names in American painting, literature, music, and scholarship testify), but have played a key role as importers—interpreters, critics, publicists—of European ideas on the American scene.

(4) Only to a small degree am I "a product of Jewish tradition"—less so, in fact, than some Christians I know—and I certainly feel no reverence for it. Some indices: (A) Though I read many periodicals regularly, COMMENTARY became one of them only a few months ago, for the magazine interests me precisely to the extent that the new editorial regime has de-Judaized its contents. (B) Just now I jotted down a list of those thinkers who have truly shaped my world view and self-image. I find that the non-Jews outnumber writers of Jewish origin eleven to three, and that in the writings I admire by the latter (Marx, Freud, Cassirer) there is nothing particularly Jewish. (C) My parents imposed Jewish tradition on me to the extent of making me take Hebrew lessons and go through a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. But some time before then—how and when I knew not—I adopted the view that there exists no God or supernatural power or supreme being, much less a specifically Jewish one, and since then have become even more convinced of the necessity of atheism (which I find logically superior to agnosticism, for reasons too complex to relate here). To me the Bar Mitzvah ritual was (and is) utter nonsense; my chief emotion at the time was shame at not having the courage to rebel against what I knew to be false.

I see no virtues unique to the Jewish tradition, and some evils. The main evil—here I follow Nietzsche—is that the Jews invented Christianity. And the Jewish tradition ultimately bears some responsibility for Nazism, for the latter is Old Testament racism stood on its head. The claim that the Jews (or any other racial or religious group) are in any sense "chosen people" is a total lie, with disastrous consequences of world-historical dimensions for Jew and non-Jew alike.

(5) All religions rest on false assumptions. I hope any children I have will become atheists.

Regarding atheism: America's peculiar contribution to intellectual conformism is not that my contemporaries typically reject atheism, but that they can't even bear to admit there are real live atheists. Whenever I get into a discussion of religion, inevitably I encounter the argument, "Even though you claim to be an atheist, you're really a religious man." This is put forward not only by middlebrow liberals but by many scholar-obscurantists (Paul Tillich is their leader) who widen the definition of "religious" until it becomes meaningless, i.e., includes everything and everyone. Maybe there is something after all to the notion that modern American character is unduly oral, for our theologians seem to operate on the principle "If you can't beat 'em, make 'em join you." Adepts of this false logic of definition should learn the wisdom of Gilbert and Sullivan, "When everybody is somebody, nobody is anybody."

(6) I am anti-Zionist. Jewish chauvinism is no less despicable than other kinds of chauvinism—and more despicable than many, since it is based on racist ideology.

The Zionists' best argument (though I think it invalid) is that the Jews who underwent special sufferings during the Nazi era should have some land of their own in compensation. But even if one grants this, it is surely indefensible that any part of such land should be forcibly taken from others. In the dispute between Israel and the 900,000 Arab refugees it has driven from their lands, I support the Arabs.

[NED POLSKY has contributed articles and reviews to the *Chicago Review*, *Dissent*, *Explicator*, and other magazines.]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marcus G. Raskin: Social and political history has been shaped, broadly, by two types of individuals: the prophets concerned with substance, and the priests concerned with form. The priests, watching over ritual and insisting that the so-called letter of the law be obeyed, have served the function of holding the group together. The prophet's role has been a different one, and broader. He is the conscience of the society, the poet of justice, the pragmatist of hope. His acts disturb the immediate, reform the future, and engender in people a non-ritualistic sense of their individual and group existence. Erich Kahler has said of prophets among the Jews that they "did not wait for questions and consultations, but took the offensive, appealed to the people as well as to the rulers, supervised the whole community, scolded and cursed it, prodded it on, and, in the final analysis, shaped its destiny." In the Biblical history of the Jews, the leaders from Moses to Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the prophet.

In our own time, such men as Marx, Freud, and Einstein have served as prophets, but in a vastly different sense from the Hebrew law-shapers of antiquity. Perhaps the best contemporary parallel of the prophetic role may be found not among the Jews but rather among the Indian people and the American Negroes. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, most recently, have been the ones to step out of the given frame of reference at the crucial moment to dramatically extend the limits of possibility. Gandhi, rising above himself to become more himself, took the tortured and the torturers both out of their mutual bondage by reasserting starkly the truths of human freedom and human justice. With a similar total commitment to humanity at the prophet-like level, Martin Luther King is teaching moral truths both to the Negro youths who go to jail and to us who jail them.

These teachers and teachings have been the exception in the 20th century; most of the century has been dominated by priests who emerge from the confusion of modern complexity to search solely for the secure, the stable, and the imposed consensus. Unhappily, the 20th-century priest has made anachronistic use of past method in his confrontation with the present dilemma. Within this context the Jew also, who earlier played the prophet's role for all of society, has now broken the dialectic between the prophet and the priest.

Yet Western civilization still seeks instinctively at least part of its conscience from the Jewish people. From the case of Adolf Eichmann, a parable is now awaited. For Eichmann—*Ich Mann*—is Everyman in the moral dialogue concerning individual and group responsibility for human actions.

IN OUR OWN American society, the problem of form and substance for the Jewish intellectual is clear. Non-intermarriage, observing dietary habits, belonging to a Temple in which attendance and observance is thought of in ritualistic terms—these are the concerns of form. Substance, on the other hand, suggests that the ethic of the Jew should be made relevant to those staggering social and political problems in which all men are involved, viz., the survival of both humanitarian principles and humanity itself. It is not only because of Jewish historical familiarity with injustice and pain that the Jew should be aware of the all-encompassing problems confronting contemporary men, but also precisely because, from his situation and tradition, he has been viewed by others as a potential prophet for modern society.

In this sense, "chosen people" means for the Jews not knowing the answers, but asking the right questions. I fear that we have stopped asking any questions and simply mouth the old answers; but we can only fulfill ourselves as men and as Jews in this troubled time by being concerned with the questions of the prophets and not the rote answers of the priests. For this task there can be no easy solutions, nor single spokesmen, but rather reaffirmation of those beliefs, goals, and responsibilities among ourselves which once provided the fertile beginnings for the greatest prophets of Western civilization. In this way we can teach ourselves and others the meaning of individual freedom, dignity, responsibility, and peace.

[MARCUS G. RASKIN, who took his law degree at the University of Chicago, is secretary to the Congressional Liberal Group in Washington, D.C., and will soon join the White House staff.]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lionel Rogosin: I think of the Jews as a large family in which brothers often don't speak to each other or everybody shouts at everybody else across the breakfast table. Nevertheless, a family—like the Karamazovs—that can produce a saint, an opportunist, a skeptic, or a renegade. For this reason Jews refuse to recognize barriers of class distinction or rank among themselves. Consider, for example, Jewish waiters. Unlike French or Italian waiters, Jewish waiters converse with their clients not only as equals but as superiors—as patronizing uncles. They give advice to which there is no alternative.

Now to your questions. In answering them I find it necessary to refer continuously to two profoundly disturbing problems. First, shall people eliminate their traditions, which retard and often enslave them, in order to build a modern chromium-plated existence of an individual emancipated, nourished, hygienic, yet demoralized and isolated? The alternatives must be considered as stages in the evolution of society, but while we meditate the machine is winning. Previously this view would have been considered pessimistic, but now that we can be annihilated by push-button warfare it has the force of truth. Secondly, if the machine leads to this inescapable fact of a possible total destruction, does not this fact cancel all considerations except the shackling of the engines of destruction? The fact obsesses contemporary thought and is pertinent to the theme of your questions.

(1) The overt manifestations of anti-Semitism in America have appeared to diminish in the last fifteen years, which reflects an awareness by American leadership that racialism is hardly worthy of the "champion of the free world." Yet all this is not entirely reassuring. In the South, acts of extreme violence have been committed against Jews and synagogues by enraged white supremacists who in their hysteria imagine the Jews as another threat to their privileges. Similarly the mass hysteria induced by the cold war has exacerbated the tendency to identify all Jews with Russia and Marxism, and this too has undoubtedly increased latent anti-Semitism. The elimination of anti-Semitism must be sought in the causes, not in the symptoms. Severe international tensions must be reduced: a new vision is needed which embraces a passion for unity and peace and a disdain for self-destructive chauvinism.

(2) With Auschwitz and Hiroshima as warnings, it is folly to ignore world events and to concern oneself solely with Jewish affairs. Fifty years ago it was natural to indulge oneself in such escapism but today Jews must subordinate this natural inclination—without regard to the approval or disapproval of the Jewish community. The allegiance of men's minds must be to those efforts which they believe will avoid catastrophe.

(3) My experience as a Jew in America has given me a sensitivity to the treatment of minorities. I am keenly aware of the failings as well as the successes of American democracy in this area, and I find it disturbing that Americans frequently express the principles and slogans of democracy without an awareness of the contradictions in practice.

The Jew in America, as in other countries, has supplied a high degree of skills and creativity to the intellectual and the economic life of the nation. Our heightened sensitivity to social evils has produced an inordinate percentage of the membership in progressive and revolutionary movements, to the dismay of the authorities and the public. (I found it extraordinary that in South Africa the overwhelming majority of whites fighting the ruthless Nationalist regime were Jews. However, these Jews were a tiny minority of the total Jewish community.)

Yet for these very qualities the Jews are indebted to the culture from which they have most suffered. One of the greatest periods of Jewish creativity was begun by Jews who had been emancipated from the life and mentality of the ghetto by the Napoleonic reforms. Not Orthodox Judaism, but Western civilization was the intellectual source of this genius. The Jewish mentality fused splendidly and indefinably with Western science. Men like Einstein and Freud seem to me to be the heirs of Aristotle and Newton *and* the unique Jewish historical experience.

(4) I have a primary involvement in the feeble yet eternal struggle for unity and self-preservation. Everyone has an obligation to all history and to all people. And yes, I see merit in the claim that the Jews have created

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

special values (a claim underestimated by those who are not Jews and overestimated by those who are), but the concept of a "chosen people with a mission" can have ugly consequences. France has proclaimed the mission of civilizing Africa and Asia; but in Algeria, the French civilizing methods are an expression of national arrogance inspired by this false concept.

As for my children, I hope that it will be possible for them to become a bit more civilized than I am. A world without mass murder would increase the chances. I want them to be familiar with the values inherent in all traditions and aware of the fallacies in all traditions. I don't believe in a system of thought that is omniscient.

(5) Given my beliefs, this possibility—that my children may convert to another religion—does not concern me.

(6) I have visited Israel four times. Obviously I have a special sympathy for Israel but not to the exclusion of other nations. In Israel, Jewish culture is dissolving in the fervor of nationalism like many ancient cultures which are crumbling under the impact of the machine age. Jewishness everywhere is gradually disappearing. I don't view the substitution of modern nationalism for Judaism without apprehension. Nationalism may be a necessary step for the evolution of a higher social order, but it generates conflict and aggression. Nationalism appeals to the sense of inferiority within man. It is the defense against self-doubt, it is the bulwark of the fractured ego. In the Jewish family-nation we identify so much with the great Jews that every Jew thinks he is something of an Einstein or at least a close relative. I don't deny that Jews have made great contributions to civilization, but I have an antipathy to Jewish chauvinism. The origin of genius is still a mystery, but I am confident that the human animal will continue to be creative without hypernationalism. In every age the creative minority has a role. Today the intellectual and spiritual leaders must oppose the extremes of nationalism which lead the blind into the inferno.

[LIONEL ROGOSIN is the producer of two widely acclaimed documentary films, *On the Bowery* and *Come Back Africa*. He is at present in India where he hopes to produce a third movie, and he is also writing a book on his experiences in South Africa.]

Edgar Rosenberg: Since the end of the war (the fifteen-year period covered by your symposium), I've been sheltered almost continuously in one university or another: Cornell, Illinois, Stanford, San Jose State, now Harvard. I had originally come to the States from Bavaria in 1940, and I should say that I began to think of myself as a fully endowed American from the moment I cast anchor in Ithaca in the winter of '45. Since then my responses to the business of being a Jew in America have been static, unassuming, acquiescent. It hasn't been, I think, much of a problem. It might have been even less of one if I had not experienced the turmoils which one inevitably encounters when one's life is radically uprooted in adolescence. I daresay that, living in the colleges, I have escaped a good deal and a good deal has escaped me. By and large, I depend on chance signs and tokens to instruct me whether the overall picture of Jewish identity and Jewish integrity in America has changed much in the past decade and a half. Somehow I think there is more of it than there used to be. Speaking as an academic, I am pretty sure there is more. It seems to me that in the late 40's, when I was taking composition courses at Cornell, very few of my classmates made an issue of their Jewishness in their writing. Now that it's my turn to teach English to the natives, I find myself swamped with manuscripts "of Jewish interest" (so much so that recently a writing student of mine, the son of a distinguished New York rabbi, complained about all that thick air of Jewish self-consciousness around him). While the college lies steeped in sentiment, spreading its gardens to the moonlight and whispering from its rooftops the last enchantments of the 17th century, the young barbarians try to sound like Salinger and their playmates madly read *Goodbye, Columbus*. Perhaps it would be odd if they didn't: evidently the astonishing number of serious and semi-serious Jewish writers who have emerged in the past decades—the Bellows and Wests and Millers and Mailers and Malamuds—exact discipleship among the undergraduates.

But having gone this far, I find myself pulled up short by the Janus-faced notion of "identity." If I measure my Self by my automatic and unconscious ties, I should say

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I am three parts American to one part Jew (the proportions are approximate). If I apply the opposite yardstick and try to gauge my identity by the conscious and palpable vibrations, the frisks and gambols and capriccios of the nerves, I am as much of a Jew as the next man. When I hear the Jews mentioned in the crowd, I suspect the worst—and half the time (just as one keeps mistaking the faces in the street for the one face which one has been straining to avoid) it wasn't the word I thought it was. By the same token, the word *Jews* used to pounce from the printed page at me like a four-letter word; but now that I've read a lot of unflattering literature about the Jews, I find that I have domesticated the thing and disinfected myself of its toxic effects. I suppose that most Jews share these responses in one degree or another.

This leaves me with a bundle of unresolved biases and crotchets (one can't call them creeds) which are haphazard, accidental, and of little interest to the nation. For example, I still wince (with a provincial's mistrust) when I hear that Goldberg has invested himself as Ormont and Katzen-Ellenbogen compressed himself into Cates. I still tend to regard converts from Judaism as lapsed souls—but if the conversion is intelligently motivated (as, say, Karl Stern's was), I've no objections. Candor compels me to confess that I find the opposite maneuver—conversion *to* Judaism—inexplicably absurd. It's as though one wanted to warn these people not to make fools of themselves by inviting gratuitous trouble. This feeling may stem, in part, from the recent rash of Hollywood conversions, which *were* absurd. Somehow (and the "somehow" reflects the general shiftiness), I've nothing whatever against intermarriages, insofar as they don't imply, to me, the breach of trust involved in downright apostasy.

All my political beliefs are linked to the fortunes of this country, and all my cultural allegiances are rooted, sentimentally and nostalgically, in the traditions of the West. I happen to prefer Bach to Bloch and Brahms to Bruch. I am surrounded by Catholic art. A Dürer portrait and a Tolstoy make eyes at each other across the living room: only last year a student of mine mistook the Dürer for a Jesus and asked me, with a touching degree of solicitude, when I had converted, and to what, and why didn't I confirm my apostasy by changing my name. Yes, certainly: Edgar Montrose would have sounded attractive, and moreover the name practically commits you to teach the novels of Walter Scott. What we think of as specifically Jewish art (Sholem Aleichem, Chagall, Agnon) hasn't so far caught up with me, though naturally I am willing to turn around and meet it halfway. At the same time, I feel an obscure and irrational pleasure whenever I discover that some artist I admire (say, Pirandello) turns out to be Jewish—just as I must have shared with many Jews an instinctive and altogether Byzantine sense of triumph at the news of the Israeli blitzkrieg. But I feel no political ties whatever to the State of Israel. As for German politics, they are precisely as remote to me as if I had never lived there. Occasionally I scan the German Jewish weekly, *Aufbau,* which goes in heavily (and on the whole intelligently) for the latest political scandal—and scandal, after all, is a form of glamor, as anybody who reads Ibsen and Snow ought to know.

[EDGAR ROSENBERG is Briggs-Copeland Assistant Professor of English at Harvard and the author of *From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (1960). He has also published fiction and criticism in literary journals.]

■ ■ ■

Philip Roth: Small matters aside—food preferences, a certain syntax, certain jokes—it is difficult for me to distinguish a Jewish style of life in our country that is significantly separate and distinct from the American style of life. (I am thinking of the urban and suburban middle classes.) What a Jew wants and how he goes after it, does not on the whole appear to differ radically from what his Gentile neighbor wants and how he goes after it. There does not seem to me a complex of values or aspirations or beliefs that continue to connect one Jew to another in our country, but rather an ancient and powerful disbelief, which, if it is not fashionable or wise to assert in public, is no less powerful for being underground: that is, the rejection of the myth of Jesus as Christ. Not only does this serve to separate the Jew from his Christian neighbor on the one side who accepts Jesus,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but also from the man on his other side who is indifferent, and even from the fellow across the street, the downright atheist, whose tradition, whose social history and bias, do not lead him to reject the Christian savior with quite the same quality of willfulness, zeal, and blood certainty.

And wherein my fellow Jews reject Jesus as the supernatural envoy of God, I feel a kinship with them. It is not the sort of kinship, however, that produces solidarity and trust between us—for the strength with which Jesus continues to be rejected is not equalled by the passion with which the God who gave the Law to Moses is embraced, or approached. What passion remains is neither for the Law nor the God, as for a few festive holidays and nostalgic ceremonies, and here, too, there is not so much evidence of passion, as of duty and guilt, a kind of religious tolerance toward one's own religion; surely this is no more true of Jews in our country than of Christians; however, it is not less true. How can it be otherwise? If indeed there were a *religious* connection between us as Jews there would be a cultural one as well: for a moral and political and social character of one's own springs not from disbelief, but faith and conviction. The result is that we are bound together, I to my fellow Jews, my fellow Jews to me, in a relationship that is peculiarly enervating and unviable. Our rejection, our abhorrence finally, of the Christian fantasy leads us to proclaim to the world that we are Jews still—alone, however, what have we to proclaim to one another?

Piety about "the tradition" does not satisfy. The values of the tradition—the laws of human conduct, the light of human intelligence—have not for a very long time now been the special property of any one people, if they ever were. I cannot but value and respect my forebears where they have struggled tenaciously against chaos and ignorance and cruelty, and value their tenacity as well; but this has not been *all* of the Jewish tradition that has been passed down to me. Nor has it been the only tradition: where the Jewish past has informed my spirit and imagination, so too has the political and cultural past of America, and the literary past of England. Neither reverence toward the tradition, nor reverent feelings about the Jewish past seem to me sufficient to bind American Jews together today. Whatever awe and grief we feel in contemplating the arc of Jewish experience, the cycle of expulsion, wandering, and suffering, the history of a people is finally its history, and its purpose is to give us some measure of our place in the world, how it has happened that we are here, acting as we do. One cannot *will* oneself into a community today on the strength of the miseries and triumphs of a community that existed in Babylonia in the 7th century B.C.E. or in Madrid in 1492, or even in Warsaw in the spring of 1943; and the dying away of anti-Semitism in our own country, its gradual ineffectiveness as a threat to our economic and political rights, further disobliges us from identifying ourselves as Jews so as to help present a proud and united front to the enemy. And that is a good thing, for it enables a man to *choose* to be a Jew, and not to be turned into one, without his free accession, by a hostile society.

Since one need not commit oneself to this religion so as to help protect its rights; since one cannot commit oneself to it simply because one's ancestors did—what then? For myself, I cannot find a true and honest place in the history of believers that begins with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob on the basis of the heroism of these believers, or of their humiliations and anguish. I can only connect with them, and with their descendants, as I apprehend their God. And until such time as I do apprehend him, there will continue to exist between myself and those others who seek his presence, a question, sometimes spoken, sometimes not, which for all the pain and longing it may engender, for all the disappointment and bewilderment it may produce, cannot be swept away by nostalgia or sentimentality or even by a blind and valiant effort of the will: how are you connected to me as another man is not?

[PHILIP ROTH won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1960 for his collection of stories, *Goodbye, Columbus.*]

■ ■ ■

Sonya Rudikoff: A part of the Jewish tradition which speaks strongly to me is suggested in a phrase from the New Year's services, the "bond of life." I know this refers primarily to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the relation between the dead and the living, but it also seems to echo significantly throughout the whole of Jewish life and thought. There are suggestions of the messianic hope, the mystery of Jewish survival, the fortitude of the suffering servant, the respect for learning and spirituality, the impulse to ethical transcendence, a commitment to justice, a devotion to life itself. The bond of life demands that we love more when we perceive a lack of love in the world, that we be more *in* the world than of it. This was the congeries of ideas, feelings, and values which came to my mind as I thought over your questions.

What interests and puzzles me, however, is the number of aspects of the Jewish tradition which seem so much at variance with this impulse. How could a people so sensitive to the bond of life develop a communal existence which so often distorts that bond? How could the idea of the hallowing of life turn into legalism and rigidity? How does critical rationalism and dissidence come to mean an insularity to experience other than the verbal? How did it happen that a people chosen for its tasks, to fulfill a mission, sometimes came to feel chosen for its perfections and talents?

As a Jew, I could wish that the Jews did not think so much about their values, talents, achievements, sense of identity, special orientation, love of intellect and learning, and all the rest, that the Jews were not so conscious of their own values. Certainly, we have such talents and values, but too great an awareness of them has been "growing to a plurisy." Sometimes Jews seem as proud of their intellectuality and free-floating rationalism as some women are of their intuition! Perhaps the values of the Jewish tradition can best be preserved and renewed by unconsciousness, perhaps in Socratic fashion we ought to love and seek not what we have but what we need.

One of the most venerable, and to me, significant, Jewish values is the uncompromising rejection of idolatry. I would certainly want to preserve and transmit it, but how is that to be done? By repetition, exhortation, celebration, punishment for transgression? These are not absent from Jewish history; yet sometimes I feel that, although Jews have renounced idolatry as it pertains to actual images, the Jewish attitude toward, say, the Talmud may have been as idolatrous in effect as if the Talmud had really been an image. Quite possibly the impulse to idolatry has merely been displaced, not truly renounced, and there is not so much reason to celebrate. (In this connection, it will be interesting to see what happens to the recent flowering of visual talent among American Jews, and whether there are consequences for Jewish observance and imagination because of the new temples designed and ornamented as works of modern art.)

"CHOOSE LIFE," says the Jewish tradition. But shouldn't Jews stop praising themselves for this, and for their ethical sense? Shouldn't Jews reconsider whether it really is life they are choosing, and the bond of life and the Living God, whether their ethical sense may not be really righteous indignation, whether the mysterious injunction is read as a demand for new action or for the reinforcement of what is already known? Perhaps the bonds of family life, so highly valued in the Jewish tradition, are more binding than blessed, more destructive than life-enhancing. Every Jewish child under five is extremely bright, has a stamp collection, can rattle off the states and their capitals. I have never heard of a Jewish child under ten who was not quite brilliant; but where are the sleepers and late bloomers in this tradition? The Hasidic elders believed in loving more where there was insufficient love; yet we know that Hasidic communities rejoiced at the death of the Vilna Gaon. The Jews who tried to prevent Abraham Geiger from taking the Breslau pulpit in the 1840's, the British Jews who fought the establishment of a Reform synagogue—well, it is hard to believe that before Reform God was more offended by organ music than by the sale of benedictions, more concerned with fringes on clothing than with love of the neighbor. And what does God think of the repeated talk about choosing life set against the prayer thanking Him for not having made the worshipper a woman?

The distortions of history have put self-hatred in the place of humility, and self-consciousness has become the humility of the Jews. Now, this may have been intended to serve a purpose, but I feel strongly that the point of being chosen for a great task

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is to work silently, like yeast in dough. The difficulty is, of course, that one must know what one is doing; to be human, one must use the capacity for what Ortega calls *ensimismarse,* to withdraw into the self for an examination of one's purposes. I'm aware as I say this that possibly the major contemporary problem, certainly the great American problem, is self-consciousness, and that trouble, as we know, began in the Garden of Eden.

Jewish self-consciousness is surely connected with the tradition's relative lack of employment for the individual soul and conscience. Except for monotheism, the question is rarely raised what must one believe to be a Jew, because Jewish identity has usually been a matter of belonging rather than belief. Although the Commandments imply a consideration of both the existence of others and the energies of self, Jewish tradition has tended to stress the others, the community, the culture. This is particularly interesting when we consider the experience of younger generations of American Jews whose parents or grandparents may have been the children of immigrants, but whose culture was not Jewish in the older more legendary sense, whose significant mental images do not refer to the tension between the Jewish community and American vocation. In a sense, this situation may be a paradigm of the contemporary American problem altogether, for, as the nation grows older, its task is to develop beyond the events of immigration, revolution, and unification. Americans have lived a life here for enough generations to find memory becoming history. Just as Americans are no longer innocents, or new men, no longer freed from history, so too the Jews in America are no longer living the legend of immigration. Much of the discussion of this subject has tended to see Jewish existence in America as a watering-down, a falling-away from older forms, in the same sense that early inquiries into American life assumed a European reference. But it may be that the Jews, whose very existence speaks of history, are necessary to American life not in the old way but in some new relation that is still to be revealed. Religion may become more significant than culture.

As for Israel, it does not speak to me, although I am interested in and sympathetic to its fate. The meaning of Jewish destiny does not seem to me fulfilled in the establishment of that State. Indeed, the very opposite strikes me, that in becoming like the nations, Israel's mission and destiny are distorted. Perhaps the establishment of the State found a solution for certain problems of Jewish life, and that is necessary and valuable; but, apart from the fact that this solution then engenders its own problems and creates a trap for both Jews and Gentiles, it seems to ignore the more historical history, the Biblical and ancient and medieval continuity of the Jewish people, the spiritual meaning of its destiny. If in the world to come we are asked anything at all, I feel it may be not why we didn't emigrate to Israel, but why we didn't sufficiently love our neighbor as ourselves.

I myself feel a reverence for this continuity, but I don't feel allied with any group or part of the Jewish community. I went to Reform Sunday Schools and did not grow up in a religious household or one particularly imbued with Jewish culture. The Jewish socialist tradition was not a part of my experience as, say, the tradition of modern art was, and I've learned more about Jewish culture from the pages of COMMENTARY than from my own experience. And, although I was confirmed by Milton Steinberg, I was at that time quite antagonistic to religious thought generally, so if his example affected me it was not in any direct sense. I'm puzzled and sobered to realize how little the demand of belief is made upon me in so much of Jewish ceremony and worship.

[SONYA RUDIKOFF has contributed fiction and criticism to *Partisan Review, Hudson Review, Arts,* and COMMENTARY. She won a *Partisan Review* Fellowship in 1957.]

■ ■ ■

Samuel Shapiro: (1) The situation of the Jew in America has not altered noticeably in the past fifteen years, at least not to my knowledge. Perhaps the establishment of the State of Israel has sharpened the sense of identification of some Jews. But postwar prosperity and the consequent decline of anti-Semitism have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had an opposite and greater effect, and tended to make us as smooth and bland as any other group of successful middle-class Americans. Except for the *yarmelkes* and the (usually concealed) Torah, the synagogue in my suburb would be hard to distinguish from some local churches.

(2) The angry rejection of their heritage by Jewish socialists in the 1920's and 1930's seems to me essentially a reflection of their Jewishness, akin to the invective and dire prophecies of Jeremiah and Karl Marx. They were Jews in opposition, just as Baudelaire and Joyce were profoundly Catholic in their anti-clericalism; a lot of them later sent their children to Jewish Sunday school. Socialism in the United States seems at the moment principally confined to small groups of ex-combatants who gather together in sectarian magazines to swap stories about the Glorious Past; there are leftist stirrings on a few campuses, but nothing to get excited about. Socialism as a political issue seemed totally defunct during the last campaign. Nevertheless, having spent most of 1959 in half a dozen Latin American countries, where socialism is taken for granted by a majority of intellectuals and is in operation in a number of basic industries, I don't feel that the socialist cause in America is as dead as it may seem to be. If the armaments race stops, and if Keynesian remedies don't halt the next depression, there will be a revival of socialism; it is there waiting to germinate, like a seed beneath the snow.

Other forms of revolt against our conventional contentment, like the Beat poetry of Allen Ginsberg and the New Conservativism of Barry Goldwater, are too conventional and too silly to take seriously.

(3) My life has had little that is specifically Jewish about it in the usual sense. I never had any religious training, I was never Bar Mitzvah'd, I never learned to speak or read Hebrew, and I have visited far more churches and cathedrals than synagogues. I don't say this in a belligerent tone, but simply as a statement of fact; I haven't consciously rejected conventional Judaism, but simply drifted away from it.

Yet I wonder if there isn't some flavor of Jewishness left, even after *kashrut* and *t'fillin* and Yom Kippur have been discarded. As a college professor and a critic of American foreign policy, I think I detect in myself some measure of those twin qualities of intellect and compassion that were always at the heart of the Jewish heritage, and that can endure after the abandonment of formal religious practices. I apply myself now to the study of U. S. relations with Latin America, a subject far removed from the traditional areas of Hebrew learning. But something Jewish somehow survives, something that I would not willingly let die. I think that Jewish culture, taken in the broadest sense, has an enormous influence not only upon American life, but upon the life of all mankind. It seems to me only a small, and in a Jew, pardonable, exaggeration to say that the world in which we live is dominated by the ideas of a handful of Jews—Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Albert Einstein (to say nothing of Jesus and St. Paul). These men also rejected much or all of traditional Judaism, but I see in them those same qualities of compassion and intellect that I discover, on a vastly reduced scale, in myself.

(4) I have never been much involved in the Jewish community in any of the many American cities in which I have lived. Even as an instructor at Brandeis University, where so large a proportion of the faculty and students is Jewish, I did not feel much force in the tradition. Only in towns and cities in the interior of Argentina, where I was received with the same kind of welcome accorded the Prodigal Son, have I ever felt myself part of the Jewish community.

My wife is also Jewish (I was about to add "of course"), but since we do not as yet have any children, I really don't know whether we would give them religious training. I have noticed that many an agnostic Jewish father sends his sons and daughters to school to learn a little Hebrew and Jewish history on weekend mornings, and perhaps I would do so also. It doesn't seem very important to me one way or the other; probably my wife will decide.

(5) I should be rather surprised if any of my children became Mormons or Methodists; but I should point out that if they were to become synagogue-going Jews, this also would amount to conversion to another religion. I don't think I'd mind any of these possibilities very much, at least if the children didn't start any energetic campaign to convert their old man.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(6) I feel a considerable amount of sympathy for the citizens of Israel, menaced as they are by hostile and dangerous neighbors. But I feel even more called upon to do what I can about the plight of those people, among whom I have lived, and whose situation I know at firsthand—the Negroes of Harlem, where I taught for eight years, and the victims of poverty and oppression all over Latin America, whose desperate situation I can testify to from personal observation.

[SAMUEL SHAPIRO, assistant professor of history at Michigan State University–Oakland and a regular contributor to the London *Economist*, is the author of the controversial "Cuba—A Dissenting Report," to which the *New Republic* devoted almost an entire issue last year. His book on Richard Henry Dana is scheduled for publication later this year.]

■ ■ ■

Barbara Probst Solomon: This symposium made me feel I was looking through a window where the glass was tilted wrong. Why, living in a time of world chaos, am I now being asked what for me are rather marginal questions, echoes from a past which is not my own? These are not my questions, the narrowness of viewpoint irritates me, but I shall try to answer them.

My greatest disagreement with the symposium is its attempt to understand today's Jew almost solely by his relation to other groups, outer forms, and traditions. This creates problems on paper which have nothing to do with life. I hear, at the end of long evenings, rather desultory conversations of young Jews—Chanukah or Christmas tree, does anti-Semitism still exist in America, how does one preserve one's Jewishness (though, interestingly enough, what is rarely mentioned is intermarriage—perhaps because one would feel slightly ridiculous mulling over something which is already working out perfectly well). The tone of these conversations is sadly lacking in the vitality of reality. Our ancestors didn't spend their time abstractly worrying about the Jewish problem. They lived with it.

I believe that the essence of being a Jew in America is that it has become an individual state of feeling rather than a collective state of being. I am left with the emotions of being a Jew; something which is nonetheless real because its true quality is inner rather than apparent, unsaid rather than said. I feel like a Jew, but I cannot *act* like a Jew. I have a memory of a noble religion in which I no longer believe, nor was taught to believe, and of a heroic struggle in which I have never participated. I am influenced not by a series of customs or traditions, but by a series of emotions and reactions which, as being a Jew has ceased to be a primary situation, fluctuate. I am least a Jew in the face of Jewish chauvinism; I was pure Jew the day I saw a deserted concentration camp.

When I say I feel like a Jew but cannot act as one, I realize I am going most emphatically against the Jewish religion. COMMENTARY has skipped over a vital point. It has concerned itself with the upholding of Jewish traditions and the Jewish community and has totally ignored the question of fidelity to a Jewish God. The great thing about the Jews is precisely their religion. This is their magnificent contribution to the world, this is what preserved them and this is what killed them. They died for their God —and not for some bastardized "culture." There is only one Jewish religion, the Orthodox. The use of a temple as a social institution, the deifying and romanticizing of an abstract Jewish culture is a vulgarization (all those Mercedes Benz's parked in front of Temple Emanu-El on Yom Kippur) and sinful and impudent in the face of what Jews have really died for.

When one gives up a belief in God, one ought to have the strength to give up the forms associated with religious observance. I feel a certain respect for the Jewish religion, and I don't know what other "Jewish traditions" COMMENTARY may have in mind. I feel no involvement with any Jewish community, nor do I see the basis for either its existence or its exclusivity. Jews should realize the enormity of their giving up of religion, and they ought to be aware at least of when they have actually done this. As a culture in limbo in America, which is a country which breaks up all traditions, they are doomed to eventual extinction and all the trumped-up Chanukahs in the world won't make a particle of difference. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only reason they can have for their continued exclusivity is some notion of purity of race—a belief which I refuse to uphold.

I don't find that the Jews in any broad, group sense have made any impact on America. Except in the most superficial aspects (slang, foods, etc.), America in the long run absorbs and dissolves all outside influences, recreating them in her own puritan image. Jews have had, however, a great effect on this country as individuals This is particularly true in the creative arts, political theory, and psychoanalysis. The anguish of deserting a strong religion, and the knowledge that Jews never wholly attach themselves to any Christian country, has always spurred certain kinds of Jews to recreate something as strong as their religion. In regard to their socialism—I personally find much in that tradition that is still morally and economically viable. There are many Jews who are socialists. There is no such thing, however, as "Jewish socialism."

COMMENTARY asks whether the position of Jews in America in the past fifteen years has changed. It isn't the Jews' position—it is *America* that has changed. I wonder if Jews would be so preoccupied with the "need for religion," if they would be scurrying back in such force to their voluntary split-level suburban ghettos, if they didn't feel in such a eunuch-like position; living in a country which is powerful, but does not feel powerful, a country which has lost its moral image of itself. One cannot ask in comfort, what is it to be an American? So instead one asks—what is it to be a Jew?

What will I give my children? What was given me? More than by religion or country, I was determined by the personality of my parents. My father believed he was responsible for and could create his own destiny, I grew up believing I could create mine. I worry for my children. I worry for their survival. I worry because they seem doomed to live in a totally traditionless world, a world where the values of humanism are crumbling and the sense of self is disappearing. The last thing I think about is whether they will convert either to formal Judaism or to the Christian religion. I wonder, instead, will they have any beliefs at all? All I feel I can give them is their strength as individuals and a morality and ethic that is active rather than reverent. The only honest sense of their history I can give them must be complex, contradictory—even confused.

I don't know whether Israel embodies the values of a Jewish tradition and I don't care. I admire it ferociously—most of all because it is real. It has met a need; Israelis are warlike when they have to be warlike—but they have fought for life and not the fatality of death. If there are ever again concentration camps, I hope my children will not walk passively toward that fate. But despite my admiration for Israel, I have only to meet an Israeli or a European Jew to know, regardless of the kinship, I am still most profoundly an American.

My landscape is not Israel. My troubles are American troubles. Engraven in my childhood were the battles my father fought in Verdun, Chateau Thierry. Suffering meant gas and trench warfare, not the pogroms. My mother waited for her older brothers to come home from the First World War, and saw the end of it in a crowd at Times Square, just as I waited for my older brother to come home from the Second, and saw the end of that one in a crowd at Times Square. And yet—for life is full of yets, even if they don't suit symposiums—somewhere in the mid-50's, when my own faith in America was rocked and my own children born, I looked at them and thought, Oh, their hair is so dark, and, Oh, where would one hike to now? But there are other days, days when I think, I cannot in good conscience have them go against what should be the moral history of their time. And to be with their history, in a good sense, they shall have to be more than Jews. Indeed, they may have to be bad Jews.

[BARBARA PROBST SOLOMON'S first novel, *The Beat of Life*, was published last year to wide critical acclaim.]

■ ■ ■

Richard G. Stern: (1) *The* situation. *The* Jew? One might collapse Mississippi Negroes or Algerian *colons* into useful singulars, but no longer American Jews. The unembarrassed and unfearful chameleonizing of the Jew in America has given him nearly as much elbow room as the white Anglo-Saxon. With of course the attendant loss which the American Jewish writers have been chroni-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cling since the last war. Literature says "Here we go," as well as "Good-by": the next ten years may see as many Jewish Eugene Hendersons as the last have seen Augie Marches, the twenty before that, Asa Leventhals. As for me, I like to think that my own attitude is my own changing, not time's. Twenty years ago, on the Saturday I should have been Bar Mitzvah'd, but was not, because one wasn't in our family, I hid out in the Paramount theater ducking the friends to whom, on Monday, I conjured up my ceremony. Five years later, in college, I claimed to be half-Jewish, partially to duck the Hillel functions and partly to try my luck on the other side of the street. Today, being a Jew is like being a Chicagoan, except that I pay no taxes (there may be hidden ones). I'm glad, rather than not, but I don't spend thirty minutes a year congratulating myself, or indeed, thinking of myself as a Jew. Would this—what, lassitude?—have been possible in 1920 or even in 1945? Not even for the most assimilated of Jews, in this one's opinion.

(2) I imagine that there have always been "accepting" and "denying" Jews, as there are will-and-won't reactions to all "penalties of medium severity." There were certainly Jewish socialists who remained Jewish in ritual, community feeling, and self-consciousness, just as there were many of the sort the question describes. I think that Jewish socialists, from Lassalle on, have been, by and large, a first-class group, one which kept closer to humanism—again, by and large—than their Christian cohorts. The group of American Jewish socialists of the 30's didn't play nearly so important a role as the earlier Europeans, and I think that many of their notions were essentially poetic—e.g. their view of American popular culture as something especially vile and especially contagious I stuff in the barrel with the Distributist's vision of the 12th century or the Agrarians' of the old South. Yet my heart goes out to them. Their intellectual belligerence showed up a lot of messes. That tradition is, I hope, viable. If it involved attacks on Jewish parochialism, that did not, and does not deaden it for me, though such attacks would seem gratuitous today.

(3) When I think of my "experience as an American," I think of being identified as the holder of an American passport, and thus happily distinguished by an aura of purchasing power or, in Germany, of Occupation Force *mana*. Since I haven't been a winterer in Miami Beach, "my experience as a Jew" has not been similar. The noticeable identifying moments have been on the order of contributing to this symposium or being asked by a severe Jordanian border guard if I'd ever heard of the Stern Gang. As for "Jewish culture—in the broadest sense," the influence on every form of American life is immense, beyond calculation. The masochism of Jewish song writers and comedians, the emotional Woolworths of Louis B. Mayer, the occult austerities of hundreds of physicists and composers, the Brandeis-Frankfurter-Ben Cohen form of the Second New Deal, a shape here, a phrase there, concepts, feelings: who can number or define the influences? Just as a shot in the dark, I'll suggest this: harsh rebukes, open love, self-abasement, all of which individualize and color. Since the American "myth" pivots on individuality, perhaps Jews have tended to give new fuel to the myth at a time when it was really needed. Italian Americans could have added the same sort of fuel, but I don't think they've poured in a tenth as much.

(4)-(5) *Any* obligation, *any* sense? I feel whips over a "No," though "reverence," supplies a little advance salve. I was taught as a seven year old to say, "I am an American Jew." It was said mechanically, but the mechanism was worked by pride. I'm not proud of being an American nor of being a Jew. Lucky? Mostly. Content? Mostly. Certainly there is a continuity, a history, which serious men can examine and generalize about, but "obligation," "sense of reverence?" I want to say "N-O!" writ large and with an exclamation point to drown out what may be some shameful doubt. As for getting involved in "the Jewish community," there is a tattered allegiance which involves such self-examination as this symposium response, but little more. In an emergency, I might not be the last one to the hose. As for my children, they are half-Jews to the extent that I am Jewish, and they know about that, and about what would have happened to them if they lived in Munich in 1935. They are probably a bit better informed about Passover than Rafferty's children. As for the claim that "the Jewish people have created or preserved certain special values,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I think this is mostly true and mostly glorious. It is also true of the Nepalese Sherpa, Catalonians, and Americans. (I better add that I don't know if it's true of the Jews as a "people." How about the Falasha Jews in Abyssinia?) I don't think that one transmits Jewishness to one's children, as one sends them to a good school—for what it can bring them. The transmission of Jewishness means the transmission of a consciousness, and that should not be artificially induced. If my children have, or get it, splendid, or if they "convert to another religion," or rather, take up another religion, also splendid. I reserve the privilege of letting loose shafts at any choice and will try and be brave about any shot back.

(6) I'm particularly conscious of it, as I am about Sammy Davis, Jr. I'm more interested in it than in many new states, but think that I might be anyway. A "legitimate claim" on my sympathies? If anything, it has what I regard as an illegitimate claim, but on my sympathies and interest, not necessarily on my charitable dollar. As for the embodiment of Jewish tradition, who can say what best embodies so ancient and complicated a phenomenon? Perhaps some Mormon sect in southwest Utah. Israel does seem at least a mirror fulfillment of a prophecy, but then, even Nostradamus was "right" once in a while.

[RICHARD G. STERN, author of the novel *Golk*, teaches in the department of English at the University of Chicago. His second novel, *Europe*, will be published in September.]

■ ■ ■

Allan Temko: (1) Bigotry in virtually all of its forms, anti-Semitism not least among them, has declined perceptibly in this country since the last war: as a historical American phenomenon, it may in fact be moribund. The "kike" is no longer "a Jewish gentleman who has just left the room"—to repeat Jacob M. Schiff's admirable definition—but a dwindling figure rapidly growing as extinct as the Cabbalist, and as shadowy in outline to a new generation of Jews as to Christian students who (with a modicum of self-conscious liberalism, granted) invite them to join hitherto impenetrable fraternities. Such episodes, of course, are only part of a broader national mood which in coming years, unless a severe economic depression stirs traditional prejudices into a semblance of former vigor, should have powerful ramifications throughout the fabric of American society. The blender of our national culture is whirling, and although large lumps remain, the mixture is becoming remarkably smooth.

For even racial segregation, as James Baldwin noted recently, "is dead," and the "real question facing the nation is just how long, how violent, and how expensive the funeral is going to be." (If this verdict appears premature, it is worth comparing the present social emancipation of Orientals on the West Coast with their pre-1945 pariah status which was as abject as that of Negroes elsewhere in the country.) In the undeniably milder, but no less terminal, case of anti-Semitism, the elegies are being intoned so discreetly, so softly, by so many sweetly mixed voices in this era of interdenominational fellowship, that we may never know when the interment takes place. It will have occurred, flowers will be found blooming on the grave, and that will be that.

Will "Jewishness"—which I take to be the quality of considering oneself a Jew—be buried at the same time? By paradox the very enfranchisement of "minority groups"—their Americanization—has accelerated the nation's progress towards a homogeneous, not to say homogenized, culture which, at worst, can be reduced to a quasi-Yiddish joke on TV. The sudden blunting of their marginal "edge" has understandably disturbed many Jews, including some who a short time ago were eager to "pass" and frequently did, but who now wish to check their imminent absorption into the egalitarian sea. They remind me of a Taos Indian who had been psychoanalyzed, and wondered where his "Indianism" had gone.

Of all the elaborate gestures on which such Jews have thus far relied in order to preserve their Jewishness, the construction of resplendent synagogues and community centers appears to me the most strangely unavailing, and the religious revival which ostensibly is taking place within them, the most pathetic. While driving past such a monument with a partner in a once exclusively Gentile firm, whose middle-class Russian Jewish background almost identically parallels my own, he observed laconically:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Gave them a thousand dollars." He did not give them anything else, but I expect that to the Episcopal vestrymen in his office, as well as to the Internal Revenue Service, the offering had a certain value.

Otherwise bagels and lox of a Sunday morning were the sum of his Jewishness; and I have been forced to ask myself, are they also the sum of my own?

I think not, if only because of my awareness—an informed awareness—of the grand tragic poem of Jewish history, and my suspicion that its final scene is being written with almost unbelievable swiftness under the impetus of the worldwide revolution of our times. The most insignificant role in this epic, like that of a chorister in *Faust*, gives the modern Jew an invaluable sense of "separateness" which not only possesses tragic beauty in itself, but provides him with insights into larger tragedies of the age.

But this in the end is a primitive "separateness" when seen in the context of the finest aspirations of the 20th century. If ever our inadequate politics become worthy of our magnificent science and technology (which Bellamy long ago knew required only rational control for the creation of Utopia), a higher separateness—an unprecedented individualism liberated from historical mystique, but with unending mystery of its own—should result. If we take away the snail shell of formal religion—Einstein replied to the question, What is a Jew?—the tender creature then exposed remains a snail nevertheless. Yet the analogy is inexact. The snail would either perish, or become a new kind of creature altogether. In any case the shell, like gorgeously wrought medieval armor, is obsolete; and although we can give it a more vivid, true, and honorable place in the museum of civilizations than did Toynbee, we cannot make it useful or even comfortable again.

(2) The socialism of the early 20th century was a crudely surfaced mirror in which the Jew—like everyone else—saw a distorted image. Today we have new mirrors, but I don't know that they are more clear.

(3) The second question under this heading is a non-sequitur. Jewish culture in the broadest sense of the term includes the full legacy of Israel: law, language, arts, and history, as well as sectarian theology. Modern American life, and particularly the Puritan streak which runs deep in the American grain, would be inconceivable without this heritage. Therefore the first question logically should come second. My answer then would be (a) that my experiences as a Jewish American compose an organic whole in which specifically American qualities are overwhelmingly dominant, but (b) these qualities are inseparable from the Jewish cultural heritage which has helped to form American civilization. The influence, say, of Frank Lloyd Wright on that civilization—to cite a single master whose contributions have strongly affected my thinking—is in part Biblical. Not without reason Eric Mendelsohn saw Wright, in his Arizona desert encampment, as an Old Testament chieftain with the gift of moral prophecy.

(4) I feel a deep obligation to study Jewish history, art, and folk tradition—subjects which are profoundly instructive, and at times inspire admiration, delight, and sorrow, but reverence no. In urging my children to undertake similar studies, and in fact supervising this phase of their education (for I do not know a more able teacher in my community as far as Jewish matters are concerned), I have tried to adhere to Shaw's maxim: "Do not give your children moral and religious instruction unless you are quite sure they will not take it too seriously. Better be the parent of Henri Quatre and Nell Gwynne than of Robespierre and Queen Mary Tudor."

(5) The conversion of my children would be no more calamitous than their *religious* adherence to Jewish liturgy, ritual, and supernatural dogma. In either event I would have failed as their father, teacher, and friend. On the other hand, to participate in traditional religious observances is in itself no more dangerous than the reading of Plato. Both can be sources of wisdom.

(6) The establishment of the State of Israel was simply another step in the Westernization of the non-industrialized regions of the world. As such, it may be considered as much American as Jewish. What confuses the situation at present is that the population is almost entirely Jewish, in the same sense that I myself am Jewish. Wait a generation or two, and see.

[Allan Temko teaches English at the University of California in Berkeley, and is the author of *Notre-Dame of Paris* (1955).]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OBSERVATIONS

THE NOVELS OF VANCE BOURJAILY

HARRIS DIENSTFREY

THE FOUR NOVELS of Vance Bourjaily have not received much attention, partly, I think, because they have not been properly understood. The first of them, *The End of My Life* (1947), was discussed very favorably by John Aldridge in his book *After the Lost Generation;* and though he saw in it "occasional callowness and crudity," Aldridge wrote that "no book since *This Side of Paradise* has caught so well the flavor of youth in war time, and no book since *A Farewell to Arms* has contained so complete a record of the loss of that youth in war." In commenting on the main character's change from "the confident cynicism of his prewar attitude to the self-destructive horror induced . . . by . . . war," Aldridge isolated a theme that has remained central to all of Bourjaily's novels: each of them (while revealing increased control) has continued to relate the war's "self-destructive" effect to larger contexts. Now, in *Confessions of a Spent Youth**—Bourjaily's best book, I think—he has written a long, complex novel, naturalistic yet quietly lyrical, in which the experiences of one young man from 1939 to 1946 comprehend features of American life which have been decisive for the past twenty years.

There are, at the outset, two general points to be made about Bourjaily's work. The first refers to its preoccupation with a concern which also serves to distinguish most current American fiction from the fiction of the fifteen or so years that followed World War I. In various degrees, all of these earlier novels were infused by the sense that the American dream, whatever it was, had been lost. Whether lost because of a group's willful malice, or by natural death, or by some mysterious and intangible process, and causing in turn sorrow or bitterness or cynicism or compassion—whatever the reason or the response—the novels that came out of the First World War all testified that the dream was gone.

F. Scott Fitzgerald took this loss as the subject of much of his work, and *The Great Gatsby* contains its most eloquent description:

> I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes —a fresh green breast of the new world. . . . For a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And this same specter—of a lost American dream—looms throughout the novels of Fitzgerald's contemporaries, Dos Passos and Faulkner, Hemingway and Wolfe.

But the ambience of today's fiction comes from a loss which belongs to individuals, not to a nation: the loss of the ability to feel. Saul Bellow's Eugene Henderson plunges into Africa in the hope of finding something to satisfy an inner voice that cries *I want, I want, I want;* Ralph Ellison's "invisible man," after putting his faith in one con-man after another, plummets into a manhole for a first chance to glean his own commitments; Norman Mailer's Sergius O'Shaugnessy returns from Korea to look for a good time "two hundred miles from the capital of the cinema," hoping to regain "the strength to try again." Each of these men, emotionally drained or filled with a kind of hysterical energy, is sustained mainly by the knowledge of his own emptiness and the one chafing desire that still abides—to feel again, honestly and with confidence. None of these novels—*Henderson, Invisible Man,* or *The Deer Park*—are similar in

* Dial Press, 434 pp., $4.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tone or content; and I only want to indicate here a basic theme around which they all focus, and which is even clearer in Bourjaily's books, the absence of emotion and emotional certainty.

I think it is more or less clear that the concern with feeling currently encompasses a good deal more than these novels or their readers. The wide fascination of violence, drugs, and sex, for the press as well as the hipster, at least in part would seem to be the fascination of feeling for those who fear its loss. So with the appeal of the Beats (all questions of their virtues, stupidities, program, or literature to one side) which often rests on their apparent ability to say "wow!" and mean it. I would argue too that the growing interest in Reich and away from Freud is another sign of the same concern: crudely put, the change indicates a shift from concepts which untangle feelings to those which help create them. Even the pronouncements concerning the lack of support given by the "silent" generation to social or political causes, what were these statements but tangential recognitions of "feelinglessness," and comments on a generation whose members are cruelly uncertain of their feelings and sometimes violent in their fluctuations from passivity to desire?

THE WAY THAT Bourjaily has chosen to portray this loss of feeling in his latest novels, *The Violated* and *Confessions of a Spent Youth,* points to the second important generalization to be made about his work. Since World War II, most American fiction has gotten at American life indirectly. The "regional" novels, such as those of Wright Morris and Flannery O'Connor, carefully delimit a particular landscape or geographical location, and then treat that setting and its inhabitants as a metaphorical construct of America. Other novels, somewhat like didactic fables, offer characters who are meant to break through to an ideal concept of behavior or belief that is hidden or harshly denied by the circumstances of modern America—*Henderson the Rain King* is one example, or Mark Harris's *Something About a Soldier,* or Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums.* In a third type of novel, the main character looks for a career, considers or briefly engages in several, and so cuts through certain cross sections of American life which are meant to stand for the whole of it; this is the approach of *Augie March,* of *Invisible Man,* and of *The Deer Park.*

It is in this sense that Bourjaily's first two novels were also "symbolic." The main character in *The End of My Life,* a volunteer in the Ambulance Corps in Africa, is made to stand for an entire generation. As he gradually comes to lose all his feeling for other people, and thus all his desire for life, he represents in extreme, as Aldridge noted, the effects of the war. *The Hound of Earth,* Bourjaily's second novel, takes place in a department store during the ten or so days before Christmas. Its main character is an American physicist who, hearing of the blast at Hiroshima, instantly realizes that this is the end result of the secret project on which he even then is contributing some relatively minor work. In a paroxysm of guilt and shame, he deserts his family and wanders from city to city and job to job, always avoiding connection, hunted by the FBI, until, at the store, after a series of complicated developments during the Christmas rush, he finally overcomes his horror of action, and allows himself to feel again.

But Bourjaily's last two books have made every attempt to eschew these metaphorical devices, and for this reason they stand apart from most American fiction. The four main characters of *The Violated,* three men and a woman all born after the First World War, represent no particular minority, neither Jews nor intellectuals; and as they grow up and live through the war's ensuing prosperity, the depression, the Second World War, and the curious peace which follows, the novel always urges that the problems and opportunities the characters face are in no sense out of the ordinary. Now, in *Confessions of a Spent Youth,* although Bourjaily has returned to the material of *The End of My Life,* he continues to approach it as he did the material of *The Violated,* naturalistically, as if it had meaning only because of its complete usualness. "I was only average . . ." the main character of *Confessions of a Spent Youth* says, "give or take some variety in the times my luck was good, yours bad," vice versa. With this average man as hero, the novel explores America.

Confessions of a Spent Youth is U. S Quincy's first-person story of his life f

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1939 to 1946. He is seventeen when the novel begins and twenty-four when it ends; and he has three particulars to tell about: "Sex, friendship, the war which became my world—these were the things on which, in the seven years, my life and effort focused, and in about that order of importance, though at times the first two were reversed." His story begins when he has completed high school; a series of revelations follows—concerning his first girl, his first love, almost two years of college (fraternity life and drinking), almost five combatless years of war (first as a volunteer in the Ambulance Corps, then as a draftee in the army), and finally, all his friends and friendships during these various times; it ends shortly after the war with Quincy's recognition that he had "better open up some possibilities for [himself], find a direction, make a commitment." Accepting the ways of the world around him and the life it most readily offered, Quincy, like each of his friends, receives as return on his spent youth only enough wisdom to realize his lack of direction and of commitment, and only enough courage to try to find both.

The characters, events, and ideas in *Confessions of a Spent Youth* are held together by a tone of detached yet committed inquiry and by a conversational style that moves easily from quiet humor to unobtrusive lyricism. "I do not mean to be mock-eighteenth century or mock-Germanic, or mock-anything," Quincy says about midway through his long, loosely-structured narrative, "—only direct and truthful—when I say I thank you for your attention this far, and that I hope I can continue to engage it as you read on." Though the book's dialogue is awkward at times, and some of its characters are drawn too broadly, these faults are only minor distractions; for *Confessions* is not meant to be a series of stunning moments that rush together in overpowering brilliance. Its aim and achievement lie in a story that is consistently interesting, sometimes comic, and always intelligent. I intend only praise—no slight to anyone—when I say that *Confessions* comes on like a friend rather than a man possessed.

As background for many of Quincy's "confessions," providing a sort of counterpoint, are some newer additions to American folklore. Quincy explains, for example, that the prevision of his first sexual encounter was stimulated by those realistic American novels whose scenes of sexual initiation "took a form so stereotyped as to be almost mythic." And Quincy can, in fact, report that "not Eugene Gant, nor Ima Fool, not Ivan Tonowhi nor Nick Adams nor even Studs himself ever had it so sordid, so perfectly sordid." But quite unlike these others, Quincy does not feel shame or disappointment with his "myth made flesh." "Inwardly," he recalls, "I am strutting, revelling, romping, ready to go again, and I am neglecting to feel the guilt, the melancholy, the sense of loss." (In retrospect, he does have "the mimimum grace" to recognize that a loss was suffered. But during the encounter—"I am seventeen and the loss is not my own.")

The chapter on Quincy's college life is called "Quincy at Yale." But Quincy promptly notes: "I did not, by the way, go to Yale . . . so my title for this confession is traditional and, I hope, evocative." No part of the college myth is relevant—"Whiffenpoofs, blue sweaters, briar pipes, and Albie Booth"—college was none of these.

> Here is the image I intend: a stripling, sitting in the dark, on the steps of a Gothic library building, at one A.M., drunk and alone, hiccuping as light snow falls on his insentient shoulders from the cold night sky of a New England spring.

But Bourjaily intends these confessions to be more than semi-comic jabs at some assorted fancies of the American dream life. Like Bellow, Ellison, and Mailer, he is describing an American education, and he means Quincy's narrative to serve as an assessment of that education and of the time and country which gave it.

In most American novels the main character stands alone. He may attach himself to a surrogate father (against whom he will eventually rebel), but he is essentially isolated: at the beginning because society rejects him, at the end because he rejects society (or has set himself to transform it). In *Confessions of a Spent Youth,* however, Bourjaily is attempting something else (as was Bellow in *Adventures of Augie March*) —not the single crucial friendship that changes one's life, but the many friendships of varying intensities and kinds, typically

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

provisional, that a young man ordinarily experiences as he grows older. Quincy explains that at college it was his friend Jeff "who persisted in liking me and even in trying to protect me from the results of my perverse, sophomore expedition towards oblivion." When Quincy enters the Ambulance Corps and makes "the closest friend I'd ever had," he thereby finds the "spores" of his mind "shook loose." Later, the victim of an apparently incurable form of gonorrhea, tormented and despairing, Quincy is again helped by a friend, who almost by chance leads him to recognize "that it is never properly himself to whom a man extends his deepest sympathy."

Though the friendships end, and the friends are capable of betraying each other, the characters here (unlike Bellow's) mainly draw their emotional support from friendship, and only friendship gives them a sense of common cause. "At the war's end," Quincy says, "there was no home town, no girl, no career, no goal, nor, in any cohesive sense, any family. . . . In a perfectly real way, [my friends] were all I had." This single possession and comfort implies all those others which a community or a culture might provide—Quincy's list of negatives suggests some—yet of these the careers of Bourjaily's characters are all bereft. It is from friendship alone that Quincy gains the strength and the chance to grow.

But what of the comforts of sex, the importance of love? As Quincy relates his adventures and those of his friends, he aims to illustrate a bitter proposition: that the experiences of love and lust in "our twentieth century, in America," exclude one another. "Where did it come from," he asks, "that polar incompatibility of sex with deep affection in my schoolboy mind?" The wounding and comic question that ends Quincy's first love, platonic by his choice, speaks for the influence of America. His girlfriend puts it to him: " 'Can a girl who necks keep a boy's respect? . . . I've been wondering about that.' " It is the voice, Quincy knows, of the American teenager; he knows also that it is the other half of the decision he himself had made for "love." "I knew then, that this first, best innocence was gone for Joan, and that it was my own clumsy teaching, now taking its delayed effect, which had destroyed it."

A few of the characters set themselves to achieve a wedding of these emotions, but none achieve it. "If love . . . means the preferring of one object above all others, then I loved Cynthia Ann all right, and what a sad and silly reason for marrying her that would have been." And the book closes upon Quincy's difficultly accomplished, but self-achieved release from a relationship sustained solely by the press of his desire: "It was as bad a moment as I'll ever have."

To this thicket of unexpressed and congested feeling, and of feelings never named because never experienced, the war brings a proper setting (and one very different from the setting brought by the war which ended America's innocence).

> Why should I, who am without scars, have lived these last fifteen years as if some important bit of myself . . . had its only existence in a memory so old? I think it may be because I did, after all, leave a piece of myself back there in the war—but let me add quickly: anybody did. The piece we left—may I presume for once to speak for others?—was part of our ability to feel.

Such a loss is neither quickly restored nor easily contained. "There seem, and I wish to say this without loaded words, so I shall use doctor's language—to be certain kinds of emotional stimuli to which I am not capable of responding genuinely, even now; that, if I have a disability, is mine." And as it is Quincy's, so it is the disability of his friends, touching all their relationships and reaching out into their society and into the children of that society.

Quincy's decision to "find a direction, make a commitment" is cast against all the dead weight of his truncated feelings. The ability of *Confessions of a Spent Youth* to reveal the exertion of self-will (and even willful cruelty) that lies behind this decision is a measure of the book's success and its significance. So, similarly, is its portrayal of the loss of feeling that gradually occurs in the typical life represented by U.S.D. Quincy. For if, finally, the events of that life are not altogther typical, the loss they led to is.

[Harris Dienstfrey's last previous article was "Sizing Up the Mass Media" in February.]

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LETTERS FROM READERS

Analyzing "The Wall"

To the Editor of Commentary:

I was particularly distressed by the mean-spirited piece on the Millard Lampell-John Hersey play, *The Wall* [George M. Ross, January]. As a theater professional, I am able to say categorically that Mr. Ross was unable to distinguish between the faults of the playwright and the faults of the director. He praised Joe Buloff's characterization of Shpunt (it is the best work by any actor that I have seen this season), but as a working playwright Mr. Ross should know that an actor does not create *above* the words he speaks. There are fine things in this uneven play; it may not be an important piece of theater, but it is an important emotion. . . .

There are moments of tenderness as well as terror in this play. And Mr. Ross could have said so. There is, to go back to Fishel Shpunt, the complete evocation of the gallows' humor of the *Yiddishe golos*. There is Halinka's cry to her fleeing father, "Take me with you, I don't look Jewish."

Mr. Ross disparages Mr. Lampell's line, "Life goes on!" Life does. If it is a cliché, people live by their clichés, and they address one another by them. And how outrageous of Mr. Ross to condemn the futility of the Warsaw uprising. (I write from memory; I do not have his words before me.)

One of the punishing reasons for the commercial failure of *The Wall* was that it was silently boycotted by Jewish theater parties. I called the producer's office, as Mr. Ross should have done, and found to my dismay that as of November of last year not a single temple, sisterhood, or Jewish charitable organization had booked this play. Instead they were patronizing *Irma La Douce* and *Under the Yum Yum Tree,* proving the merit of Harry Hirschfield's thesis, that "If it's a play about Jews, the Christians won't come and the Jews will want passes."

When I was a student, one of the books we read, belonging to that dead era, was *Jews without Money*. Now there are suburban Jews with money but without tears. How sad!

Finally, to prove that there is equity in the world, I suggest that when Mr. Ross's play opens, you ask Mr. Lampell or Mr. Hersey to review it.

Morton Wishengrad

Wynnewood, Pa.

To the Editor of Commentary:

George M. Ross tends to misrepresent and to misunderstand Dr. Bettelheim's inquiry into "behavior in extreme situations." Mr. Ross suggests that Dr. Bettelheim would have called the Jews [in the Warsaw ghetto] "cowards". . . . [But] Dr. Bettelheim is attempting to understand what happened during World War II—he is not passing moral judgment. In his own words (from *The Informed Heart*): "Here, and at other places I cannot help discussing issues of morality. But if I do so, my purpose is not to presume that I know what is right or wrong for others. . . . I write as a psychologist, trying to explain why what happened, happened." Mr. Ross could have quoted the following passage to explain Dr. Bettelheim's theses rather than distort them: "It seems that an institution like the concentration camp permits of no really successful defense—the only way not to submit to it in some measure would have been to destroy it." One senses that Mr. Ross has examined Dr. Bettelheim's ideas as superficially as he claims the play *The Wall* examined the question of resistance.

Bernard H. Pucker
Youth Director
Beth Shalom Congregation
Kansas City, Missouri

Mr. Ross *writes*:

To choose not to distinguish between the faults of the director and those of the playwright I agree was bound to be somewhat unfair to the playwright. I did not however find the distinction sufficient to relieve Mr. Lampell of his failure to deal with the morality of resistance in anything but clichés (by Mr. Wishengrad's own admission) and melodrama.

Do people in the heat of living and dying really live by their clichés? I don't believe so, but if they do, this kind of truth can better serve the bitter parodies of Eugene Ionesco than a play which hopes to move us and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

convince us of the efficacy of resistance. I think Mr. Wishengrad is rationalizing. It may be difficult for a writer to avoid clichés. It is foolish to defend them as true.

I *did* say, to Mr. Lampell's credit, that the character of Fishel Shpunt was brought faithfully from the book to the stage "by both *text* and actor."

I have nowhere "condemned the futility of the Warsaw uprising." Its relative futility in terms of physical survival is a historic fact. I have on the contrary pleaded in effect that (1) this fact be faced, and that (2) its moral implications be met and felt—and not with palliative clichés—in behalf of human dignity and sanity. Otherwise the futility of the Warsaw uprising is absolute. John Hersey let us see this. Mr. Lampell did not.

As for Mr. Pucker, in writing about *The Wall,* it was not my purpose to "examine" Dr. Bettelheim's "ideas," superficially or otherwise, nor to "represent" his inquiry into "behavior in extreme situations." For an expression of an attitude I found particularly harsh and dangerous, I referred to a foreword [to Miklos Nyiszli's *Auschwitz*] that Mr. Pucker has obviously not read, in which Dr. Bettelheim does not write as a psychologist and does not in the least shy from passing moral judgment. In that foreword Dr. Bettelheim says not once but many times that the only way not to have submitted to the concentration camp was to die fighting back. While I find this position dangerously oversimple, I admire Dr. Bettelheim's courage in pronouncing without equivocation his hard-headed moral judgment much more than Mr. Pucker's softhearted attempt to disguise it behind the scientific method.

A Program for the Cold War

To the Editor of Commentary:

Of the many grave matters that remain at issue between Staughton Lynd and myself ["The Origin of the Cold War," February], and which cannot be debated in this brief space, there is one point of personal privilege, as it were, to which I must reply. It is Mr. Lynd's insinuation that I am a "preventive warrior." He does me a profound human, as well as political, injustice —especially since nothing in my article warrants such an imputation.

I am the prisoner of no fears, as Mr. Lynd suggests, nor would my foreign policy posture—which he is ungracious enough to guess at incorrectly—help bring about a nuclear holocaust. On the contrary, the approach I would propose promises to prevent *without* a war the erosion and ultimate destruction of our national interests and of institutions of freedom around the world.

I believe in forthrightly taking the measure of a self-declared enemy and combatting him as skillfully and flexibly as the situation demands. I believe this must be done not only as a matter of indispensable self-defense, but as the very precondition and essential concomitant of responsibly meeting the rising expectations of underprivileged people throughout the world. For nearly a half-century of experience ought by now to have taught us that where Bolshevism comes, whether in Russia, China, Eastern Europe, or elsewhere, new and more fearsome forms of servitude, degradation, and terror appear. This is as much a danger for the new nations as for us.

Their revolution of rising expectations, including the necessary planning, need not everywhere and at all times be carried forward by authoritarian means. I submit, indeed, that American foreign policy, in attuning itself to this revolution, will in the long run be self-defeating if it is not equally geared to helping the new nations attain just political as well as economic institutions. The satisfaction of material needs alone is hardly a sufficient foreign policy objective. To it must be coupled a genuine, steady endeavor to aid in the establishment of indigenous forms of institutions that will enhance individual liberty. Such a dual mission is worthy of a nation with the traditions and spirit of Western civilization.

In that context, I can have no less concern for the aspirations of the people of Eastern Europe, China, and Russia than for those of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Freedom is for me as indivisible as peace, and a program aimed at the enhancement and extension of political and economic freedom, at the creation of institutions that allow for maximal options and choices, requires resistance to tyranny, whatever its form. This is how I read the relevant passages in President Kennedy's State of the Union address, and I will happily stand on that.

Moshe Decter

New York City

Lavon and the Military

To the Editor of Commentary:

S. Z. Abramov delineated certain features of the "Lavon Affair" [February] but h sketched the outline of others. . . . Far

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sail away to Europe...

start your trip to Israel on CUNARD'S

Vacation Island

Step aboard for a luxurious seagoing Cunard holiday across the Atlantic! After the pleasures of your voyage, thrill to the sights of all-Europe. Convenient connections to Israel offer opportunities to visit London or Paris en route!

Splendid meals, flawless service. Dances, parties, sports, games • Special attention to dietary needs • Facilities for worship aboard ship.

Cunard Prepaid Service . . . reliable, carefree way to bring loved ones to America.

CRUISES IN EVERY SEASON

Caronia Mediterranean Cruises
May 8, August 29, October 3.

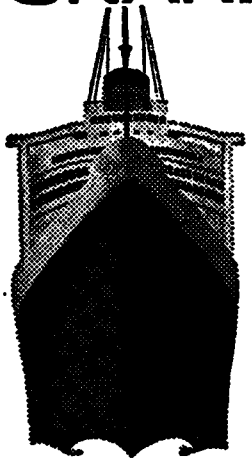
Caronia North Cape Cruise
June 29.

South Pacific—Far East Cruise
Jan. 27, '62.

SEE YOUR TRAVEL AGENT

Getting there is half the fun! Go

CUNARD



CUNARD LINE
25 Broadway, N. Y. 4 • BO 9-5300
441 Park Ave., N.Y. 22 • PL 5-4300

spelling democracy's triumph [as Abramov asserts], the defeat of Lavon by the ascendant younger set may mean the replacement of one powerful institution, Histadrut with its historic and essential democratic socialism, by another equally powerful and far more dangerous, the military establishment. The inability of Lavon, as the civilian head of the Ministry of Defense, to force the resignation of several senior officers in 1954, and the failure of Mapai to sustain his vindication in 1961 may imply that the military is already the center of real political power in Israel.

GEORGE DARGO

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Revolutionary Democracy

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In your excellent January issue, Mr. Ray Alan's analysis of the Algerian crisis ["Political Crisis in France"] presents a clarification of France's wretched policy in that unhappy land; Dean Nisbet's criticism of some new methods in political science ["Voting Practice vs. Democratic Theory"] draws our attention to some basically wrong assumptions about democracy.

I entirely agree with Dean Nisbet that liberal democracy is not as infallible or as universally applicable as the Enlightenment thought. Yet this democracy has its basis in "ideological" attitudes which arose in the 17th-century English revolutions of which the young American republic became the most prominent heir, and which found their embodiment in political and social institutions that corresponded to this new spirit of freedom of opinion, expression, and of the right to opposition and diversity. This open and pluralist society was a revolutionary venture. . . . The religious heritage of Judeo-Christianity was as much alive in Russia and Prussia, in Spain and Sicily, Armenia and Ethiopia, as in England—it nowhere else gave rise to modern democracy and liberty. . . . Dean Nisbet brilliantly points out that given certain moral, intellectual, and social conditions, it does not matter that only 50 per cent of the electorate turns out for the vote, as far as the preservation of a reasonably free society is concerned. But these conditions are the result of a unique and profound revolution of moral and intellectual attitudes which took place in a few countries during the Enlightenment.

HANS KOHN

New York City

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Barricini
wishes you a
HAPPY PASSOVER
חג פסח שמח

for
FUND RAISING
SUCCESS
with
EXTRA PROFITS,
contact
BARRICINI
CANDIES
Dept. G 35
22-19 41st Avenue
Long Island City 1, N. Y.

כשר לפסח
KOSHER FOR PASSOVER

BARRICINI
Famous the World Over
for Fine Kosher Candies

HELP STOP DEATH
ON THE HIGHWAY

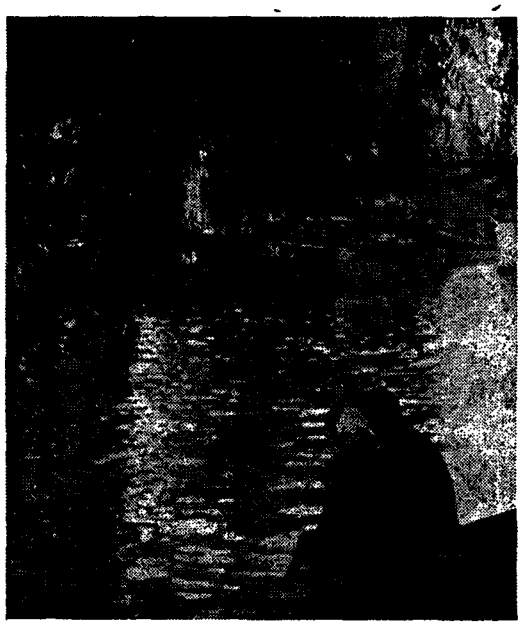
WHERE TRAFFIC
LAWS ARE OBEYED
DEATHS GO DOWN!
SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL
SAFETY ORGANIZATION
Published as a public service in
cooperation with The Advertising Council

Change of Address

Help us deliver your **Commentary** without delay! Please allow 4 weeks for a change of address. In requesting a change, send your old, as well as your new, address.

Commentary / 165 EAST 56th STREET
NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



EUROPE AT HOME

Escape to Europe, to an enjoyment of art treasures, to fresh ideas and bright new horizons... in REALITES Magazine.

Every month explore the world of travel, art, current events, fashion, food, philosophy – *all* the things that make up "the art of living."

Wise and witty articles are matched only by the superb reproductions of "The Most Beautiful Magazine In The World." REALITES stays young, lively and lovely by its freedom of expression, fine craftsmanship and exploration of new techniques.

From Paris each month, REALITES will grace your home or testify to your good taste as the most luxurious gift of the year! In English-language or French-language editions.

Available by subscription only.

$15.00 a year (12 issues)

Réalités

REALITES in America, Dept. 66, 381 Madison Ave., New York 17, N.Y.
Please enter my subscription to REALITES:
☐ English Edition ☐ French Edition ☐ 1 year $15.00 ☐ 2 years $25.00
NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
CITY: _____ ZONE: ____ STATE: _____
☐ Payment enclosed. ☐ Please bill me. ☐ Send gift announcement card.

The Idea of the Jewish State

By Ben Halpern

An analytical history of the Zionist idea from the days of Theodor Herzl, through the achievement of statehood to the 1956 Sinai campaign. Dr. Halpern explores thoroughly the central theme of sovereignty, analyzes the changing relations of the Zionist Movement and the State of Israel to Diaspora Jewry and to the present international situations. He also provides the background information for judging the probable effects of objective circumstances on Israel's future. $10.00

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
79 Garden Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts

SCRIBE PROUDLY ANNOUNCES
THE FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION
OF

EVER SINCE SINAI

A Modern View of Torah

By

JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

A well-known writer
on Modern Jewish Theology
presents his views
on basic religious issues

Tentative publ. date April 1961

At your bookstore — cloth bound $2.95

Scribe Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 62, New York 40, N.Y.

Your Book Published!

If we think your manuscript has unusual possibilities, we will offer you a straight royalty or partial subsidy basis. Send manuscript for free editorial report or write for Brochure CC.

Pageant Press, 101 Fifth Ave., New York 3, N.Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE JEW WITHIN AMERICAN SOCIETY

A Study In Ethnic Individuality

By C. Bezalel Sherman

This volume explores the developments of the American Jewish community and its place in the mainstream of American Democratic life. It offers an important contribution to acculturation theory. "Neither America nor the Jew has been wholly on the receiving or wholly on the giving end in the casting of the Jewish community as an integral part of the American nation and as a segment of the Jewish people. . . . This is what makes the evolution of the Jewish settlement in this country so significant and fascinating a page in the annals of both the United States and the Jewish people."—*FROM THE AUTHOR'S FOREWORD.*

280 pages. $5.95

THE JEWISH IMMIGRANT IN ENGLAND, 1870-1914

By Lloyd P. Gartner

". . . It is remarkable that the first thorough study of the Jewish immigrant from eastern Europe into England during the latter part of the nineteenth century should be made by an American Jew writing fifty years after the end of the movement. Mr. Gartner has done a solid piece of research into the English official documents, the Hebrew and Yiddish press of the world, the archives of Jewish bodies in England, and an impressive catalogue of books and articles. Every page bears witness of his conscientious research."—*THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT.*

320 pages. $5.00

CONGRESSIONAL CONTROL OF FEDERAL SPENDING

By Robert Ash Wallace

". . . The nation's biggest business — the federal government, which this year will spend $80-billion through its regular budget and another $20-billion through its trust funds — operates in an unbusinesslike manner. This will come as no surprise to critics of government, but the critics are often hard put to it to document their case. That job has now been done for them by Robert Ash Wallace. . . ."—*BUSINESS WEEK.* *198 pages. $5.95*

MOSES HESS: Utopian Socialist

By John Weiss

This intellectual biography of the "father of German socialism" describes Moses Hess's early utopian philosophy, his eventual reaction against idealism and conversion to Marxist socialism, and finally, his return to a faith in ideas. Hess, the man who launched the socialist careers of both Marx and Engels, was the first of the idealistic and utopian Socialists to be converted, by Marx himself, to Marxist socialism. *80 pages. Paperbound, $1.95*

THE CULTURE OF THE STATE MENTAL HOSPITAL

By H. Warren Dunham and S. Kirson Weinberg

Important new insights into the problems of our state mental hospitals are provided by the unique approach of two outstanding sociologists. They see the mental hospital through the eyes of those whose daily lives are spent within the walls — the employees and the patients.

309 pages. $5.00

Books to watch for —

April—DEMOCRACY: A MAN-SEARCH, *by Louis Sullivan.* *$7.95*

April—EDUCATION IN VIOLENCE: The Life of George H. Thomas and the History of the Army of the Cumberland, *by Francis McKinney.* *$9.50*

May — MERRILY WE SING: 105 Polish Folk Songs, *by Harriet Pawlowska.* *$8.50*

June—THE POLITICAL WORLD OF AMERICAN ZIONISM, *by Samuel Halperin.* *$8.00*

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS • Detroit 2, Michigan

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What you DON'T SEE will help you!

Crystal-clear AMOCO is up in knock-free performance—still NO LEAD!

You Can Actually See The Difference that makes AMOCO unique—it's colorless. For AMOCO is crystal clear . . . proving it contains no lead. And thanks to American Oil Research, you now get all the benefits of the only lead-free motor fuel, plus finer knock-free performance than ever!

Your Engine Runs More Efficiently. Spark plugs and valves give longer life, mufflers last longer. You'll save costly tune-ups and repairs with unleaded AMOCO.

So Fill Up With AMOCO Today. You'll find *the big difference in gasolines is crystal-clear.* This one-and-only unleaded gasoline is now greater than ever . . . *up* in knock-free performance for power and mileage.

AMOCO
UNLEADED MOTOR FUEL
—costlier refining instead of lead

AMERICAN OIL COMPANY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED